This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

The theological works ...

Thomas Scott

Digitized by Google

Tappan Presbyterian Association
LIBRARY.

Presented by HON. D. BETHUNE DUFFIELD.
From Library of Rev. Geo. Duffield, D.D.

Digitized by Google

BX
9426
.S43
1830

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Revd Thomas Scott
Rector of Aston Sandford

Digitized by Google

THE

1146 D 230 Sco 3

THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE

REV. THOMAS SCOTT,

AUTHOR OF A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE.

CONTAINING

THE FORCE OF TRUTH,—TREATISE ON REPENTANCE,—GROWTH IN GRACE,—SERMON ON ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,—SERMONS ON SELECT SUBJECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION,—AND THE NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

EDINBURGH:

PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.

M.DCCC.XXX.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Gift
Tappan Presb. Ass
2-13-1932

CONTENTS.

FORCE OF TRUTH.

PART I.

Page.

An Account of the state of the Author's mind and conscience in the early part of his life, especially shewing what his sentiments and conduct were, at the beginning of that change of which he proposes to give the history, ... 9

PART II.

A History of the change which has taken place in the Author's sentiments; with the manner in which, and the means by which it was at length effected, 14

PART III.

Observations on the preceding Narrative, ... 38

DISCOURSE UPON REPENTANCE.

INTRODUCTION, ... 57

PART I.

Concerning the Necessity of Repentance, ... 60

PART II.

The Nature of Repentance, ... 69

PART III.

Encouragements to Repentance, ... 76

PART IV.

The proper Season for Repentance, ... 82

PART V.

The Means of Repentance, ... 86

CONCLUSION, ... 92

APPENDIX.

Concerning Hallowing the Sabbath, ... 95

Digitized by Google

Page.

TREATISE ON GROWTH IN GRACE.

INTRODUCTION, ... 105

SECTION I.

An enumeration of those particulars in which the true believer's growth in grace consists; as far as they are explicitly contained in the apostle's prayer for the Philippians, ... 108

SECTION II.

Containing some additional Observations on the Nature and Effects of Growth in Grace, as deducible from other Scriptures, ... 126

CONCLUSION, ... 130

SERMON ON ELECTION.

John vi. 37—40.—" All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." 141

ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION.

ESSAY I.

On the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, ... 163

ESSAY II.

On the Importance of Revealed Truth; the duty of Reading the Scriptures, and the manner in which it should be performed, ... 171

ESSAY III.

On the Scripture Character of God, ... 177

ESSAY IV.

A Brief Exposition of the Ten Commandments, as comprising the substance of the Moral Law, ... 183

ESSAY V.

On Man's Situation as a Sinner in this present world, ... 193

ESSAY VI.

On the Deity of Christ, ... 199

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VII.

Page.

On the Doctrine of our Lord's Deity, shewing it to be Essential to Christianity; with a brief Answer to some Objections, ... 208

ESSAY VIII.

On the Nature and Design of the Mediatorial Office, sustained by the Lord Jesus Christ, ... 215

ESSAY IX.

On the Merits and Atonement of Christ, ... 221

ESSAY X.

On our Lord's Exaltation, and his appearance in the "presence of God for us," 229

ESSAY XI.

On Justification, ... 235

ESSAY XII.

On Regeneration, ... 242

ESSAY XIII.

On the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit, with some Thoughts on the Doctrine of the Sacred Trinity, ... 248

ESSAY XIV.

On the Gifts and Influences of the Holy Spirit, ... 255

ESSAY XV.

On the uses of the Moral Law, in subserviency to the Gospel of Christ; 261

ESSAY XVI.

On the Believer's Warfare and Experience, ... 268

ESSAY XVII.

On the Privileges Enjoyed by the True Believer, ... 274

ESSAY XVIII.

On the Dispositions and Character peculiar to the True Believer, ... 281

ESSAY XIX.

On the Dispositions and Character peculiar to the True Believer, *(Continued)* 287

ESSAY XX.

On the Believer's Attention to Relative Duties, ... 295

ESSAY XXI.

On the Believer's Attention to Relative Duties, *(Continued)* 302

ESSAY XXII.

On the Christian's Improvement of his Talents, ... 308

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXIII.

Page.
On Prayer, ... 315

ESSAY XXIV.

On Baptism and the Lord's Supper, ... 322

ESSAY XXV.

On the State of Separate Spirits, the Resurrection of the Body, Judgment, and Eternity, ... 328

SERMONS ON SELECT SUBJECTS.

SERMON I.

The Truth and Importance of Scripture Revelation.—Deut. xxxii. 47. "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life." 339

SERMON II.

Religion Man's Great Concern.—Deut. vi. 6—9. "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them as a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates." 347

SERMON III.

Isaiah's Vision Explained and Applied.—Isaiah vi. 5—8. "Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips! for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts:—Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me," 354

SERMON IV.

Nature and Extent of the Divine Love.—1 John iv. 8. "God is Love." 363

SERMON V.

On Repentance.—Acts xxvi, 19, 20. "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." 373

SERMON VI.

On Regeneration.—2 Corinthians v. 17. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." 382

SERMON VII.

The Danger of Rejecting the Gospel.—Psalm ii. 12. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him." 391

Digitized by Google

SERMON VIII.

Page.

Christ's Coming to Judgment.—1 Corinthians iv. 5. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." 400

SERMON IX.

Final Retribution of Believers and Unbelievers.—Romans ii. 5—9. "Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." 409

SERMON X.

Godliness the only source of True Happiness.—1 Timothy vi. 6. "Godliness with contentment is great gain." 418

SERMON XI.

Character and Criminality of Lukewarmness in Religion.—"Revelation iii, 15, 16. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot; so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." 427

SERMON XII.

Christianity Recommended by an Exemplary Conduct.—Matthew v. 16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." 435

SERMON XIII.

Inefficacy of Hearing without Practising the Word.—James i. 22—25. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." 444

SERMON XIV.

Faith, Hope, and Charity, Explained and Contrasted.—1 Corinthians xiii. 13. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three: but the greatest of these is charity." 453

SERMON XV.

On the Celebration of Christ's Nativity.—Luke ii. 13, 14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." 464

SERMON XVI.

Goodness of Providence an Excitement to Gratitude.—1 Samuel vii. 12. "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." 474

SERMON XVII.

On the Proper Improvement of National Afflictions.—Isaiah ix. 13. "For the

Digitized by Google

Page.
people turneth not unto him that smiteth them; neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts." 484

SERMON XVIII.

Christ the Lamb of God.—John i. 29. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." 496

SERMON XIX.

On the Resurrection.—1 Cor. xv. 20. "Now is Christ risen from the dead." 506

SERMON XX.

On the Agency of the Holy Spirit.—Isaiah xxxii. 15. "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." 515

SERMON XXI.

On a Conversation becoming the Gospel.—Philippians i. 27. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ." 524

THE WARRANT AND NATURE OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION, ... 535

SECTION I.—The Subject Opened, ... 539

SECTION II.—Scriptural proofs that the sinner wants no warrant for believing in Christ, except the Word of God, ... 542

SECTION III.—Some reasons for insisting on this position,—"that the Word of God is the sinner's only and sufficient warrant for believing in Christ," 547

PART II.

SECTION I.—The terms Defined and Explained, ... 552

SECTION II.—Saving Faith the effect of Regeneration, ... 555

SECTION III.—Saving Faith always accompanied by other things essentially holy, 568

SECTION IV.—The Holy Nature of Faith more directly shewn, ... 575

SECTION V.—Saving Faith the Principle of all other holy Dispositions, Affections, and Behaviour, ... 582

SECTION VI.—Some Reasons assigned for insisting on the Holy Nature of Saving Faith, ... 588

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

ALMOST twenty years have now elapsed since the ensuing Narrative was first published. During this time the Author has had abundant opportunities of examining, over and over again, the principles which he then intended to inculcate. If, therefore, he had, on further reflection, materially altered his sentiments, he should have thought himself bound, by the strongest obligations, to retract what he had erroneously advanced. But he is thankful that, on the contrary, he feels it incumbent on him to declare most solemnly, as in the presence of God, that every thing which he has since experienced, observed, heard and read, has concurred in establishing his most assured confidence, that the doctrines recommended in this publication, are the grand and distinguishing peculiarities of genuine Christianity.

Very many *verbal* corrections, with a few retrenchments and additions, will be found in this Edition. In improvements of this kind, the Author has bestowed considerable pains: but, he has been *scrupulously*, and almost *superstitiously*, careful to admit no alteration, which can in the least degree change the meaning of any passage.

He feels thankful, that the leading desire of his heart, in publishing a work, which seems to relate almost exclusively to himself and his own little concerns, has not been wholly disappointed; but he would earnestly request the prayers of all, who favour the doctrines here inculcated, for a more abundant and extensive blessing on this, and all his other feeble endeavours, to contend earnestly "for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Chapel-Street, Oct. 16, 1798.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE

FORCE OF TRUTH.

PART I.

An Account of the state of the Author's mind and conscience in the early part of his life, especially shewing what his sentiments and conduct were, at the beginning of that change of which he proposes to give the history.

THOUGH I was not educated in what is commonly considered as ignorance of God and religion, yet, till the sixteenth year of my age, I do not remember that I ever was under any serious conviction of being a sinner, in danger of wrath, or in need of mercy; nor did I ever, during this part of my life, that I recollect, offer one *hearty* prayer to God in secret. Being alienated from God through the ignorance that was in me, I lived without him in the world, and as utterly neglected to pay him any voluntary service, as if I had been an *Atheist* in principle.

But about my sixteenth year I began to see that I was a sinner. I was indeed a leper in every part, there being "no health in me;" but, out of many external indications of inward depravity, conscience discovered and reproached me with one especially; and I was, for the first time, disquieted with apprehensions of the wrath of an offended God. My attendance at the Lord's table was expected about the same time; and though I was very ignorant of the meaning and end of that sacred ordinance, yet this circumstance, uniting with the accusations of my conscience, brought an awe upon my spirits, and interrrupted my before undisturbed course of sin.

Being, however, an utter stranger to the depravity and helplessness of fallen nature, I had no doubt that I could amend my life whenever I pleased. Previously therefore to communicating, I set about an unwilling reformation; and, procuring a form of prayer, I attempted to pay my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven. Having in this manner silenced my conscience, I partook of the ordinance: I held my resolutions also, and continued my devotions, such as they were, for a short time: but they were a weariness and a task to me; and, temptations soon returning, I relapsed; so that my prayer-book was thrown aside, and no more thought of, till my conscience was again alarmed by the next warning given for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Then the same ground was gone over again, and with the same issue. My "goodness was like the morning-dew that passeth away;" and, loving sin and disrelishing religious duties as much as ever, I returned, as "the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

With little variation, this was my course of life for nine years: but in that time I had such experience of my own weakness, and the superior force of temptation, that I secretly concluded reformation in my case to be impracticable. "Can the *Ethiopian* change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" I was experimentally convinced that I was equally unable, with the feeble

Digitized by Google

barrier of resolutions and endeavours, to stem the torrent of my impetuous inclinations, when swelled by welcome, suitable, and powerful temptations: and being ignorant that God had reserved this to himself as his own work, and had engaged to do it for the poor sinner who, feeling his own insufficiency, is heartily desirous to have it done by him, I stifled my convictions as well as I could, and put off my repentance to a *more convenient season*.

But, being of a reflecting turn, and much alone, my mind was almost constantly employed. Aware of the uncertainty of life, I was disquieted with continual apprehensions, that *this more convenient season* would never arrive; especially as, through an unconfirmed state of health, I had many warnings and near prospects of death and eternity. For a long time I entertained no doubt that impenitent sinners would be miserable for ever in hell: and at some seasons such amazing reflections upon this awful subject forced themselves into my mind, that I was overpowered by them, and my fears became intolerable. At such times my extemporary cries for mercy were so wrestling and persevering, that I was scarcely able to give over; though at others I lived without prayer of any sort! Yet, in my darkest hours, though my conscience was awakened to discover more and more sinfulness in my whole behaviour, there remained a hope that I should one day repent and turn unto God. If this hope was from myself, it was a horrid presumption; but the event makes me willing to acknowledge a persuasion that it was from the Lord: for had it not been for this hope, I would probably have given way to temptations, which frequently assaulted me, to put an end to my own life, in proud discontent with my lot in this world, and mad despair about another.

A hymn of Dr Watts' (in his admirable little book for children) entitled "*The all-seeing God*," at this time fell in my way: I was much affected with it, and having committed it to memory, was frequently repeating it, and thus continually led to reflect on my guilt and danger. Parents may from this inconsiderable circumstance be reminded, that it is of great importance to store their children's memories with useful matter, instead of suffering them to be furnished with such corrupting trash as is commonly taught them. They know not what use God may make of these early rudiments of instruction in future life.

At this period, though I was the slave of sin, yet, my conscience not being pacified, and my principles not greatly corrupted, there seemed some hope concerning me; but at length Satan took a very effectual method of silencing my convictions, that I might sleep securely in my sins; and justly was I given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie, when I held the truth that I did know in unrighteousness. I met with a *Socinian* comment on the Scriptures, and greedily drank the poison, because it quieted my fears and flattered my abominable pride. The whole system coincided exactly with my inclinations and the state of my mind. In reading this exposition, sin seemed to lose its native ugliness, and to appear a very small and tolerable evil: man's imperfect obedience seemed to shine with an excellency almost divine; and God appeared so entirely and necessarily merciful, that he could not make any of his creatures miserable without contradicting his natural propensity. These things influenced my mind so powerfully, that I was enabled to consider myself, notwithstanding a few little blemishes, as upon the whole a very worthy being. At the same time, the mysteries of the gospel being explained away, or brought down to the level of man's comprehension, by such proud and corrupt, though specious, reasonings; by acceding to these sentiments, I was, in my own opinion, in point of understanding and discernment, exalted to a superiority above the generality of mankind; and I pleased myself in looking down, with contempt, upon such as were weak enough to believe the orthodox doctrines. Thus I generally soothed my conscience: and if at any time I was uneasy at the apprehension that I did not thoroughly *deserve* eternal happiness, and was not entirely fit for heaven; the same book afforded me a soft pillow on which to lull myself to sleep: it

Digitized by Google

argued, and, I then thought, *proved*, that there were no *eternal* torments; and it insinuated that there were *no* torments except for notorious sinners, and that such as should just fall short of heaven would sink into their original nothing. With this welcome scheme I silenced all my fears, and told my accusing conscience, that if I fell short of heaven I should be annihilated, and never be sensible of my loss.

By experience I am well acquainted with Satan's intention, in employing so many of his servants to invent and propagate those pestilential errors, whether in speculation or practice, that have in all ages corrupted and enervated the pure and powerful doctrine of the gospel; for they lead to forgetfulness of God and security in sin, and are deadly poison to every soul that imbibes them, unless a miracle of grace prevent. Such, on the one hand, are all the superstitious doctrines of popery: purgatory, penances, absolutions, indulgencies, merits of good works, and the acceptableness of will-worship and uncommanded observances; what are these but engines of the devil to keep men quiet in their sins? Man, resolved to follow the dictates of his depraved inclination, and not to bound his pursuits and enjoyments by the limits of God's holy law, catches at any thing to soften the horrible thought of eternal misery. This is the awakening reflection, God's sword in the conscience, which it is Satan's business, by all his diabolical artifices, to endeavour to sheath, blunt, or turn aside; knowing that while this alarming apprehension is present to the soul, he can never maintain possession of it in peace. By such inventions therefore as these, he takes care to furnish the sinner with that which he seeks, and to enable him to walk according to the course of this wicked world, and the desires of depraved nature, without being disturbed by such dreadful thoughts. The same, on the other hand, is the tendency of all those speculations of reasoning men, which set God's attributes at variance with each other; which represent the Supreme Governor as so *weakly* merciful, that he regards neither the demands of his justice, the glory of his holiness, the veracity of his word, nor the peaceable order and subordination of the universe; which explain away all the mysteries of the gospel; and represent sin, that fruitful root of evil, that enemy of God, that favourite of Satan, as a very little thing, scarcely noticed by the Almighty, and which, contrary to the Scriptures and universal experience and observation, would persuade us that man is not a depraved creature.

To these latter sentiments I acceded, and maintained them as long as I could; and I did it most assuredly, because they soothed my conscience, freed me from the intolerable fears of damnation, and enabled me to think favourably of myself. For *these reasons alone*, I loved and chose this ground: I fixed myself upon it, and there fortified myself by all the arguments and reasonings I could meet with. These things I wished to believe; and I had my wish: for at length I did most confidently believe them. Being taken captive in this snare of Satan, I should here have perished with a lie in my right hand, had not the Lord whom I dishonoured, snatched me as a brand from the burning!

In this awful state of mind I attempted to obtain admission into *Holy Orders!* Wrapt up in the proud notion of the dignity of human nature, I had lost sight of the evil of sin, and thought little of my own sinfulness; I was filled with a self-important opinion of my own worth, and the depth of my understanding: and I had adopted a system of religion accommodated to that foolish pride; having almost wholly discarded mysteries from my creed, and regarding with sovereign contempt those who believed them. As far as I understand such controversies, I was nearly a *Socinian* and *Pelagian*, and wholly an *Arminian*:* yet, to my shame be it spoken, I sought to obtain ad-

* Possibly some readers may not fully understand the import of these terms: and for their benefit I would observe, that the *Socinians* consider Christ as a mere man, and his death merely as an example of patience, and a confirmation of his doctrine, and not as a real atonement satisfactory to divine justice for man's sins. They deny the Deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, and do not admit that all Christians experience his renewing, sanctifying, and comforting influences; and they generally reject the doctrine of eternal punishments. The *Pelagians* deny original sin, and explain away the scriptural history

Digitized by Google

mission into the ministry, in a church whose doctrines are diametrically opposed to all the three; without once concerning myself about those barriers which the wisdom of our forefathers has placed around her, purposely to prevent the intrusion of such dangerous heretics as I then was.

While I was preparing for this solemn office, I lived as before in known sin, and in utter neglect of prayer; my whole preparation consisting of nothing else than an attention to those studies which were more immediately requisite for reputably passing through the previous examination.

Thus, with a heart full of pride and wickedness; my life polluted with many unrepented unforsaken sins; without one cry for mercy, one prayer for direction or assistance, or a blessing upon what I was about to do; after having concealed my real sentiments under the mask of general expressions; after having subscribed articles directly contrary to what I believed; and after having blasphemously declared, in the presence of God and of the congregation, in the most solemn manner, sealing it with the Lord's Supper, that I judged myself to be "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take that office upon me:" (not knowing or believing that there was a Holy Ghost;) on *Sept.* the 20th, 1772, I was ordained a *Deacon*.

For ever blessed be the God of all long-suffering and mercy, who had patience with such a rebel and blasphemer; such an irreverent trifler with his Majesty; and such a presumptuous intruder into his sacred ministry! I never think of this daring wickedness without being filled with amazement that I am out of hell; without admiring that gracious God, who permitted such an atrocious sinner to live, yea, to serve him, and with acceptance, I trust, to call him Father; and as his minister to speak in his name. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." May I love, and very humbly and devoutly serve that God, who hath multiplied his mercies in abundantly pardoning my complicated provocations.

I had considerable difficulties to surmount in obtaining admission into the ministry, arising from my peculiar circumstances; which likewise rendered my conduct the more inexcusable: and my views, as far as I can ascertain them, were these three:—A desire of a less laborious and more comfortable way of procuring a livelihood, than otherwise I had the prospect of:—the expectation of more leisure to employ in reading, of which I was inordinately fond:—and a proud conceit of my abilities, with a vain glorious imagination that I should some time distinguish and advance myself in the literary world. These were my ruling motives in taking this bold step: motives as opposite to those which should influence men to enter this sacred office, as pride is opposite to humility, ambition to contentment in a low estate, and a willingness to be the least of all and the servant of all; as opposite as love of self, of the world, of filthy lucre, and slothful ease, is to the love of God, of souls, and of the laborious work of the ministry. To me therefore be the shame of this heinous sin, and to God be all the glory of over-ruling it for good, I trust, both to unworthy me, and to his dear people, "the church which he hath purchased with his own blood."

My subsequent conduct was suitable to these motives. No sooner was I fixed in a curacy, than with close application I sat down to the study of the learned languages, and such other subjects as I considered most needful, in

of the fall of man. They do not allow the total depravity of human nature, but account for the wickedness of the world from bad examples, habits, and education. They suppose men to possess an ability, both natural and moral, of becoming pious and holy, without a new creation or regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit; and they contend for the *freedom of the will*, not only as constituting us voluntary agents, accountable for our conduct, but as it consists in *exemption from the bondage of innate carnal propensities*; so that man has in himself sufficient resources for his recovery to holiness by his own exertions. The *Arminians* deny the doctrines of gratuitous personal election to eternal life, and of the final perseverance of all true believers; and numbers of them hold the doctrine of justification by works *in part at least*; and verge in some degree to the Pelagian system, in respect to the first moving cause in the conversion of sinners. (5th Ed.)

Digitized by Google

order to lay the foundation of my future advancement. And, O! that I were now as diligent in serving God, as I was then in serving self and ambition! I spared no pains, I shunned, as much as I well could, all acquaintance and diversions, and retrenched from my usual hours of sleep, that I might keep more closely to this business. As a minister, I attended just enough to the public duties of my station to support a decent character, which I deemed subservient to my main design; and, from the same principle, I aimed at morality in my outward deportment, and affected seriousness in my conversation. As to the rest, I still lived in the practice of what I knew to be sinful, and in the entire neglect of all sacred religion: if ever inclined to pray, conscious guilt stopped my mouth, and I seldom went further than "God be merciful unto me!"

Perceiving, however, that my *Socinian* principles were very disreputable, and being conscious from my own experience that they were unfavourable to morality, I concealed them in a great measure, both for my credit's sake, and from a sort of desire I entertained, (subservient to my main design) of successfully inculcating the practice of the moral duties upon those to whom I preached. My studies indeed lay very little in divinity; but this little all opposed that part of my scheme which respected the punishment of the wicked in the other world: and therefore (being now removed to a distance from those books whence I had imbibed my sentiments, and from the reasonings contained in them, by which I had learned to defend them,) I began gradually to be shaken in my former confidence, and once more to be under some apprehension of eternal misery. Being also statedly employed, with the appearance of solemnity, in the public worship of God, whilst I neglected and provoked him in secret, my conscience clamorously reproached me with base hypocrisy: and I began to conclude that, if eternal torments were reserved for any sinners, I certainly should be one of the number. Thus I was again filled with anxious fears and terrifying alarms: especially as I was continually meditating upon what might be the awful consequence, should I be called hence by sudden death. Even my close application to study could not soothe my conscience nor quiet my fears; and, under the affected air of cheerfulness, I was truly miserable.

This was the state of mind when the change I am about to relate began to take place. How it commenced; in what manner, and by what steps it proceeded; and how it was completed, will be the subject of the Second Part. I shall conclude this by observing, that though staggered in my favourite sentiment before mentioned, and though my views of the person of Christ were verging towards *Arianism*; yet, in my other opinions I was more confirmed than ever. What those opinions were, I have already briefly declared: and they will occur again, and be more fully explained, as I proceed to relate the manner in which I was constrained to renounce them, one after another, and to accede to those that were directly contrary to them. Let it suffice to say, that I was full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate; and, being situated in the neighbourhood of those whom the world calls *Methodists*,* I joined in the prevailing sentiment; held them in sovereign contempt; spoke of them with derision; declaimed against them from the pulpit, as persons full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy things to their charge; and endeavoured to prove the doctrines which I supposed them to hold, (for I had never read their books) to be dishonourable to God, and destructive to morality. And, though in some com-

* *Methodist, as a stigma of reproach*, was first applied to Mr Wesley, Mr Whitefield, and their followers: and to those who, professing an attachment to our established Church, and disclaiming the name of Dissenters, were not conformists in point of parochial order, but had separate seasons, places, and assemblies for worship. The term has since been extended by many to all persons, whether clergy or laity, who preach or profess the doctrines of the reformation, as expressed in the articles and liturgy of our Church. For this fault they must all submit to bear the reproachful name, especially the ministers; nor will the most regular and peaceable compliance with the injunctions of the Rubric exempt them from it, if they avow the authorized, but in a great measure exploded, doctrines to which they have subscribed. My acquaintance hitherto has been solely with Methodists of the latter description, and I have them alone in view when I use the term.

Digitized by Google

panies I chose to conceal part of my sentiments, and in all affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration; yet, scarcely any person can be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles, than I then was.

PART SECOND.

A History of the change which has taken place in the Author's sentiments; with the manner in which, and the means by which it was at length effected.

In *January*, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance, but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it; till one evening, the woman being now dead, and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour Mr Newton had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr N's doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character, than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those, who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea, with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect: and I resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty; which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependance on my own strength, I have, by divine grace, been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor: and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring, in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions: so that from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes as far as I have had opportunity; and have endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish-minister's duty.

Some time after this, a friend recommended to my perusal the conclusion of Bishop Burnet's "*History of his own Time*," especially that part which respects the clergy. It had the intended effect: I was considerably instructed and impressed by it; I was convinced that my entrance into the ministry, had been the result of very wrong motives, was preceded by a very unsuitable preparation, and accompanied with very improper conduct. Some uneasiness was also excited in my mind concerning my neglect of the important duties of that high calling: and, though I was enslaved by sin, and too much engaged in other studies, and in love with this present world, to relinquish my flattering pursuit of reputation and preferment, and change the course of my life, studies, and employments; yet, by intervals, I experienced desires and purposes, at some future period, of devoting myself wholly to the work of the ministry, in the manner to which he exhorts the clergy.

All these things increased the clamorous remonstrances of my conscience; and at this time I lived without any secret religion, because without some reformation in my conduct, as a man and a minister, I did not dare to pray. My convictions would no longer be silenced or appeased; and they became so intolerably troublesome, that I resolved to make one more effort towards amendment. In good earnest, and not totally without seeking the assistance of the Lord by prayer, I now attempted to break the chains with which Satan had hitherto held my soul in bondage; and it pleased the Lord that I should obtain some considerable advantages. Part of my grosser defilements I was

Digitized by Google

enabled to relinquish, and to enter upon a *form of devotion*. *Formal* enough indeed it was in some respects; for I neither knew that Mediator through whom, nor that Spirit by whom, prayers are offered with acceptance unto the Father: yet, though utterly in the dark as to the true and living Way to the throne of grace, I am persuaded there were even then seasons when I was enabled to rise above a mere form, and to offer petitions so far *spiritual*, as to be accepted and answered.

I was now somewhat reformed in my outward conduct: "but the renewing in the spirit of my mind," if begun, was scarcely discernible. As my life was externally less wicked and ungodly, my heart grew more proud; the idol *self* was the object of my adoration and obeisance; my worldly advancement was more eagerly sought than ever; some flattering prospects seemed to open, and I resolved to improve my advantages to the uttermost. At the same time every thing tended to increase my good opinion of myself; I was treated with kindness and friendship by persons, from whom I had no reason to expect it; my preaching was well received, my acquaintance seemed to be courted, and my foolish heart verily believed that all this and much more was due to my superior worth: while conscience, which, by its mortifying accusations, had been useful to preserve some sense of unworthiness in my mind, was now silenced, or seemed to authorize that pride which it had checked before. And having the disadvantage of conversing in general with persons who either favoured my sentiments, or who from good manners, or because they saw it would be in vain, did not contradict me; I concluded that my scheme of doctrine was the exact standard of truth, and that by my superior abilities I was capable of confuting or convincing all who were otherwise minded. In this view of the matter, I felt an eager desire of entering into a religious controversy, especially with a *Calvinist*: for many resided in the neighbourhood, and I heard various reports concerning their tenets.

It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr Newton commenced. At a visitation, *May* 1775, we exchanged a few words on a controverted subject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse; but a day or two after he sent me a short note with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted: and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer; God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions.

I had indeed by this time conceived a very favourable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him; being acquainted with the character he sustained even among some persons, who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But, on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had had the curiosity to hear him preach; and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications; but, for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

Concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me;) with the greatest affectation of candour, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the

Digitized by Google

mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me; but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

In this manner our correspondence began; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till *December* the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions; except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

This, however, is certain, that through the whole of the correspondence, I disputed, with all the arguments I could devise, against almost every thing which he advanced, and was very much nettled at many things that he asserted. I read a great part of his letters, and some books which he sent me, with much indifference and contempt. I construed his declining controversy into an acknowledgement of weakness, and triumphed in many companies as having confuted his arguments. And, finally, when I could not obtain my end, at my instance the correspondence was dropped.

His letters and my answers are now by me; and on a careful perusal of them, compared with all I can recollect concerning this matter, I give this as a faithful account of the correspondence. His letters will, I hope, shortly be made public, being such as promise greater advantage to others, than, through my proud contentious spirit, I experienced from them. Mine deserve only to be forgotten, except as they are useful to me to remind me what I was, and to mortify my pride; as they illustrate my friend's patience and candour in so long bearing with my ignorance and arrogance; and notwithstanding my unteachable quarrelsome temper, continuing his benevolent labours for my good; and especially as they remind me of the goodness of God, who, though he abominates and resists the proud, yet knows how to bring down the stout heart, not only by the iron rod of his wrath, but by the golden sceptre of his grace.

Thus our correspondence and acquaintance, for the present, were almost wholly broken off; for a long time we seldom met, and then only interchanged a few words on general topics of conversation. Yet he all along persevered in telling me, to my no small offence, that I should accede one day to his religious principles; that he had stood on my ground, and that I should stand on his: and he constantly informed his friends, that, though slowly, I was surely feeling my way to the knowledge of the truth. So clearly could he discern the dawnings of grace in my soul, amidst all the darkness of depraved nature and my obstinate rebellion to the will of God!

This expectation was principally grounded on my conduct in the following circumstances:—Immediately after the commencement of our correspondence, in *May* 1775, whilst my thoughts were much engrossed by some hopes of preferment; on Sunday, during the time of divine service, when the Psalm was named, I opened the Prayer-Book to turn to it; but (*accidentally* shall I say, or *providentially*?) I opened upon the articles of religion; and the eighth, respecting the authority and warrant of the *Athanasian* creed, immediately engaged my attention. My disbelief of the doctrine of a Trinity of *co-equal persons in the unity of the Godhead*, and my pretensions to candour,

Digitized by Google

had both combined to excite my hatred to this creed; for which reasons I had been accustomed to speak of it with contempt, and to neglect reading it officially. No sooner, therefore, did I read the words, "That it was to be thoroughly received, and believed; for that it might be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture," than my mind was greatly impressed and affected. The matter of subscription immediately occurred to my thoughts; and from that moment I conceived such scruples about it, that, till my view of the whole system of gospel-doctrine was entirely changed, they remained insuperable.

It is wisely said by the son of *Sirach*, "My Son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation." I had twice before subscribed these articles, with the same religious sentiments which I now entertained. But, conscience being asleep, and the service of the Lord no part of my concern, I considered subscription as a matter of course, a necessary form, and very little troubled myself about it. But now, though I was greatly influenced by pride, ambition, and the love of the world, yet my heart was sincerely towards the Lord, and I dared not to venture on a known sin, deliberately, for the sake of temporal interest. *Subscription to articles which I did not believe, paid as a price for church-preferment, I began to look upon as an impious lie, a heinous guilt, that could never truly be repented of without throwing back the wages of iniquity.* The more I pondered it, the more strenuously my conscience protested against it. At length, after a violent conflict between interest and conscience, I made known to my patron my scruples and my determination not to subscribe: thus my views of preferment were deliberately given up, and with an increasing family I was left, as far as mere human prudence could discern, with little other prospect than that of poverty and distress. My objections to the articles were, as I now see, groundless: much self-sufficiency, undue warmth of temper, and obstinacy, were betrayed in the management of this affair, for which I ought to be humbled: but my adherence to the dictates of my conscience, and holding fast my integrity in such trying circumstances, I never did, and I trust never shall, repent.

No sooner was my determination known, than I was severely censured by many of my friends. They all, I am sensible, did it from kindness, and they used arguments of various kinds, none of which were suited to produce conviction. But, though I was confirmed in my resolution, by the reasonings used to induce me to alter it, they at length were made instrumental in bringing me to this important determination:—*not so to believe what any man said, as to take it upon his authority; but to search the word of God with this single intention, to discover whether the articles of the Church of England in general, and this creed in particular, were or were not, agreeable to the Scriptures.* I had studied them in some measure before, for the sake of becoming acquainted with the original languages, and in order thence to bring detached texts to support my own system; and I had a tolerable acquaintance with the historical and preceptive parts of them: but I had not searched this precious repository of divine knowledge, with the *express design of discovering the truth in controverted matters of doctrine.* I had very rarely been troubled with suspicions that I was or might be mistaken: and I now rather thought of becoming better qualified, upon Scriptural grounds, to defend my determination, than of being led to any change of sentiments.

However, I set about the inquiry; and the first passage, as I remember, which made me suspect that I might be wrong, was James i. 5. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." On considering these words with some attention, I became conscious, that, though I had thought myself wise, yet assuredly I had obtained none of my wisdom in this manner; for I had never offered one prayer to that effect during the whole course of my life. I also perceived that this text contained a suitable direction, and an encouraging promise, in my present inquiry; and from this time, in my poor manner, I began to ask God to give me this promised wisdom.

Digitized by Google

Shortly after, I meditated on, and preached from John vii. 16, 17. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me; if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." I was surprised that I had not before attended to such remarkable words. I discovered that they contained a direction and a promise, calculated to serve as a clue in extricating the sincere inquirer after truth, from that labyrinth of controversy in which, at his first setting out, he is likely to be bewildered. And though my mind was too much leavened with the pride of reasoning, to reap that benefit from this precious text which it is capable of affording to the soul that is humbly willing to be taught of God, yet, being conscious that I was disposed to risk every thing in doing what I thought his will, I was encouraged with the assurance, that if I were under a mistake, I should sometime discover it.

I was further led to suspect that I might possibly be wrong, because I had not hitherto sought the truth in the proper manner, by attending to Proverbs iii. 5, 6. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." I could not but know that I had not hitherto *trusted in the Lord with all my heart*, nor *acknowledged him in all my ways*, nor *depended on his directions in all my paths*; but that, in my religious speculations, *I had leaned wholly on my own understanding*.

But, though these and some other passages made for the present a great impression upon me, and influenced me to make it a part of my daily prayers, that I might be directed to a right understanding of the word of God; yet my pride and addictedness to controversy had, as some desperate disease, infected my whole soul, and was not to be cured all at once.—I was very far indeed from being a little child, sitting humbly and simply at the Lord's feet, to learn from him the very first rudiments of divine knowledge. I had yet no abiding suspicion, that all which I had heretofore accounted wisdom was foolishness, and must be unlearned and counted loss, before I could attain to the excellency of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ: for though I began to allow it probable that in some few matters I might have been in an error, yet I still was confident that in the main my scheme of doctrine was true. When I was pressed with objections and arguments against any of my sentiments, and when doubts began to arise in my mind; to put off the uneasiness occasioned by them, my constant practice was, to recollect as far as I could, all the reasonings and interpretations of Scripture on the other side of the question; and when this failed of affording satisfaction, I had recourse to controversial writings. This drew me aside from the pure word of God, rendered me more remiss and formal in prayer, and furnished me with defensive armour against my convictions, with fuel for my passions, and food for my pride and self-sufficiency.

At this time Locke's "*Reasonableness of Christianity*," with his "*Vindications*" of it, became my favourite pieces of divinity. I studied this and many other of Mr Locke's works, with great attention and a sort of bigotted fondness; taking him almost implicitly for my master, adopting his conclusions, borrowing many of his arguments, and imbibing a dislike to such persons as would not agree with me in my partiality for him. This was of great disservice to me; as, instead of getting forward in my inquiry after truth, I thence collected more ingenious and specious arguments, with which to defend my mistakes.*

But one book which I read at this time, because mentioned with approbation by Mr Locke, was of singular use to me: this was Bishop Burnet's "*Pastoral Care*." I found little in it that offended my prejudices, and many

* After having spoken so freely of Mr Locke's divinity, which I once so highly esteemed; it seems but just to acknowledge the vast obligation, which the whole religious world is under to that great man for his "Letters concerning Toleration," and his answers to those who wrote against them. The grounds of religious liberty, and the reason why every one should be left to his own choice, to worship God according to his conscience, were, perhaps, never *generally* understood since the foundation of the world, till by these publications Mr Locke unanswerably made them manifest.

Digitized by Google

things which came home to my conscience respecting my ministerial obligations. I shall lay before the reader a few short extracts, which were most affecting to my own mind. Having mentioned the question proposed to those who are about to be ordained Deacons, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministry, to serve God for the promoting of his glory, and the edifying of his people?" he adds, (page 111,) "Certainly the answer that is made to this ought to be well considered: for if any one says," "I trust so," "that yet knows nothing of any such motion, and can give no account of it, he lies to the Holy Ghost, and makes his first approach to the altar with a lie in his mouth, and that not to men, but to God." And again, (page 112,) "Shall not he (God) reckon with those who dare to run without his mission, pretending *that they trust they have it*, when perhaps they understand not the importance of it; nay, and perhaps some laugh at it, as an enthusiastical question, who will yet go through with the office! They come to Christ for the loaves; they hope to live by the altar and the gospel, how little soever they serve at the one, or preach the other; therefore they will say any thing that is necessary for qualifying them to this, whether true or false."

Again, (page 122,) having interwoven a great part of the excellent office of the ordination of priests into his argument, concerning the importance and weight of the work of the ministry; he adds, "Upon the whole matter, either this is all a piece of gross and impudent pageantry, dressed up in grave and lofty expressions, to strike upon the weaker part of mankind, and to furnish the rest with matter to their profane and impious scorn; or it must be confessed that priests come under the most formal and express engagements to constant and diligent labour, that can be possibly contrived or set forth in words." He concludes this subject, of the ordination-offices, by exhorting all candidates for orders to read them frequently and attentively, during the time of their preparation; that they may be aware before-hand of the obligations they are about so solemnly to enter into, and to peruse them at least four times in a year, even after their ordination, to keep in their minds a continual remembrance of their important engagements. How necessary this counsel is, every minister, or candidate for the ministry, must determine for himself; for my part, I had never once read through the office when I was ordained, and was in a great measure a stranger to the obligations I was about to enter into, till the very period; nor did I ever afterwards attend to it till this advice put me upon it. The shameful negligence and extreme absurdity of my conduct in this respect are too glaring, not to be perceived with self-application, by every one who has been guilty of a similar omission. I would therefore only just mention, that hearty earnest prayer to God, for his guidance, help, and blessing, may be suitably recommended, as a proper attendant on such a perusal of our obligations.

Again, (page 147,) he thus speaks of a wicked clergyman: "His whole life has been a course of hypocrisy in the strictest sense of the word, which is the acting of a part, and the counterfeiting another person. His sins have in them all possible aggravations: they are against knowledge, and against vows, and contrary to his character: they carry in them a deliberate contempt of all the truths and obligations of religion; and if he perishes, he doth not perish alone, but carries a shoal down with him, either of those who have perished in ignorance through his neglect, or of those who have been hardened in their sins through his ill example!"—Again, (page 183,) having copiously discoursed on the studies befitting ministers, especially the study of the Scriptures, he adds, "But to give all these their full effect, a priest that is much in his study, ought to employ a great part of his time in secret and fervent prayer, for the direction and blessing of God in his labours, for the constant assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for a lively sense of divine matters; that so he may feel the impressions of them grow deep and strong upon his thoughts; this, and this only, will make him go on with his work without wearying, and be always rejoicing in it."

Digitized by Google

But the chief benefit which accrued to me from the perusal was this:—I was excited by it to an attentive consideration of those passages of Scripture, that state the obligations and duties of a minister, which hitherto I had not observed, or to which I had very *loosely* attended. In particular, (it is yet fresh in my memory,) I was greatly affected with considering the charge of precious souls committed to me, and the awful account one day to be rendered of them, in meditating on Ezekial xxxiii. 7—9. "So thou, O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of *Israel:* therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man! thou shalt surely die: If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way, to turn from it: if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." For I was fully convinced with Bishop Burnet, that every minister is as much concerned in this solemn warning, as the prophet himself. Acts xx. 17—35, was another portion of Scripture, which, by means of this book, was brought home to my conscience; especially verses 26, 27, 28, which serve as an illustration of the preceding Scripture: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

In short, I was put upon the attentive and repeated perusal of the *Epistles* to *Timothy* and *Titus*, as containing the sum of a minister's duty in all ages. I searched out, and carefully considered every text I could find in the whole Scripture, which referred to this argument. I was greatly impressed by 1 Cor. ix. 16. "For necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Nor was I less struck with Coloss. iv. 17. "Say to *Archippus*, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." This was brought to my conscience with power, as if the apostle had in person spoken the words *to me*. But especially I was both instructed and encouraged by meditating upon 1 Peter v. 2—4. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock: and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

I hope the reader will excuse my prolixity in speaking on this subject, because in itself it is very important: and though I obtained no new views of gospel-truth from *The Pastoral Care*, yet I received such a deep conviction of the difficulty and importance of that work, in which I had thoughtlessly engaged, and of the imminent danger to which my soul would be exposed, should I neglect to devote myself wholly to it; as laid the foundation of all my subsequent conduct and change of sentiments. I was, indeed, guilty of very criminal procrastination, after I had been thus convinced; and, being engaged more than I ought in other matters, I for sometime postponed and neglected complying with the dictates of my conscience. But I never lost sight of the instruction I had received, nor ever enjoyed any comfortable reflection, till, having broken off all other engagements, I had given myself up to those studies and duties which pertain to the work of the ministry. And I have cause to bless God, that this book ever came in my way.

Still, however, my self-confidence was very little abated, and I had made no progress in acquiring the knowledge of the truth. I next read *Tillotson's* sermons and *Jortin's* works: and, my time being otherwise engaged, I for a while gave into the indolent custom of transcribing their discourses with some alterations, to preach to my people. This precluded free meditation on the word of God, and led me to take up my opinions on trust. My preaching was in general that smooth palatable mixture of law and gospel, which

Digitized by Google

corrupts both by representing the gospel as a *mitigated law*, and as accepting *sincere* instead of *perfect obedience*.—This system, by flattering pride and prejudice, and soothing the conscience, pleases the careless sinner and self-righteous formalist, but does real good to none; and is in fact a specious and unsuspected kind of Antinomianism.

About this time I foolishly engaged in a course of diversion and visiting, more than I had done since my ordination; this unfitted me for secret prayer and close meditation, and rendered the Scriptures, and other religious studies, insipid and irksome to me, a never-failing consequence of every vain compliance with the world. For a season, therefore, my ardour was damped, my anxiety banished, and my inquiries retarded. I was not, however, permitted entirely to drop my religious pursuits: generally I made it a rule to read something in the Scriptures every day, and to perform a task of daily devotion; but in both I was very formal and lifeless.

Yet not long after, I was engaged in earnest meditation on our Lord's discourse with *Nicodemus* (John iii.) I felt an anxious desire to understand this interesting portion of Scripture; especially to know what it was to be "born again," or "born of the Spirit," which in five verses our Saviour has three times declared absolutely necessary to salvation. I was convinced it was absurd to suppose that such strong expressions implied no more than baptism with water. *Tillotson's* controversial sermons on this subject afforded me no satisfaction. Some great and total change I supposed to be intended, not only in the behaviour, but also in the heart. But not having clearly experienced that change, I could not understand in what it consisted. However, having offered some poor prayers for divine teaching, I undertook to preach upon it: but I talked very darkly, employed a considerable part of my time in declaiming against visionaries and enthusiasts, and reaped very little benefit from it. Yet I was so well satisfied with my performance, that, in the course of my correspondence with Mr N. I sent him these sermons for his perusal; and he, in return, sent me some of his own upon the same subject. But, though sincerely desirous to understand our Lord's meaning in this important point, I was too proud to be taught by *him*: I cast my eye therefore carelessly over some of them, and returned the manuscript, without closely attending to any thing contained in it.

Nothing material occurred after this, till the next spring, 1776; when I was induced, by what I had learned from Bishop Burnet, to establish a lecture once a-week in one of my parishes, for expounding the Scriptures. This brought many passages, which I had not before observed, under attentive consideration; and afforded my reflecting mind abundance of employment, in attempting to reconcile them with each other, and with my scheme of doctrine.

Little progress however had been made, when, *May* 1776, I heard a dignified clergyman in a visitation sermon, recommend Mr Soame Jennings' "*View of the internal Evidence of the Christian Religion.*" In consequence of this recommendation I perused it, and not without profit. The truth and importance of the gospel revelation appeared, with convincing evidence, to my understanding, and came with efficacy to my heart by reading this book. I received from it more distinct heart-affecting views of the design of God in this revelation of himself, than I had before; and I was put upon much serious reflection and earnest prayer to be led to, or established in the truth, concerning the nature and reality of the atonement by the death of Christ: for hitherto I had been, in this respect, a *Socinian*, or very little better.

But to counterbalance this advantage, Dr Clarke's "*Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity*," and the controversy which ensued upon its publication, became a favourite part of my study. The *Arian* scheme is so inconsistent with reason, that when reflecting men, in order to avoid those *mysterious*, and, as they imagine, *unreasonable* conclusions, which, according to the true meaning of words, the Scriptures contain, have become *Arians*, it is wonderful they do not, for the same cause, embrace the *Socinian* system. This is the natu-

Digitized by Google

ral progress of unhumbled reason; from *Arianism* to *Socinianism;* from *Socinianism* to *Deism;* and thence to *Atheism.* Many and awful have been the examples of reasoning and learned men, who, under the name of *Philosophers,* arrogating to themselves the prerogative of superior discernment, have manifested the propriety with which they claimed this pre-eminence, by treading this down-hill road, almost, if not quite, to the very bottom.

But when a man has fallen so low as *Socinianism,* not merely for want of information, or by blindly and implicitly adopting the sentiments of other men, but by leaning to his own understanding, and preferring the conclusions of his own reason to the infallible dictates of the Holy Ghost; it is not common for him to return gradually, by the retrograde path, first to *Arianism,* and then to the received doctrine of the Trinity. Yet this was my case.—Dr Clarke appeared to me so undeniably to establish his argument by express scriptural evidences, and so plausibly to defend his system on both sides, and to back his cause with so many seeming authorities, that I found myself unable any longer to maintain my *Socinian* principles, and was constrained to relinquish them as untenable: at the same time I was not aware of the flaw in his reasoning, and the unavoidable consequence of his middle doctrine; namely, "that the Son and Holy Spirit, however exalted or dignified with names and titles, must either be *mere creatures,* or that otherwise there must be three Gods." Not perceiving this, and my newly acquired reverence for Scripture, and my old self-confidence and fondness for reasoning being, by this conciliating scheme, both humoured, I cordially acceded to his sentiments, and for a long time could not endure any other doctrine.

Nothing further of any consequence occurred till about December 1776, when carelessly taking up Mr Law's "*Serious Call,*" a book I had hitherto treated with contempt, I had no sooner opened it, than I was struck with the originality of the work, and the spirit and force of argument with which it is written. I mean merely as to his management of the subjects he treats of: for there are many things in it that I am very far from approving; and it certainly contains as little *gospel,* as any religious work I am acquainted with. But though a very uncomfortable book to a person who is brought under a serious concern for his soul, and deep convictions of sin, it is very useful to prepare the way, to show the need we have of a Saviour, and to enforce the practice of that holy diligence in the use of means, which the important interests of eternity reasonably demand. This was its use to me. By the perusal of it, I was convinced that I was guilty of great remissness and negligence; that the duties of secret devotion called for far more of my time and attention than had been hitherto allotted to them; and that, if I hoped to save my own soul, and the souls of those that heard me, I must in this respect greatly alter my conduct, and increase my diligence in seeking and serving the Lord. From that time I began to study in what manner my devotions might be rendered more fervent and pertinent; I transcribed and committed to memory, scriptural petitions; I employed some time in reading manuals of devotion; made attempts to compose prayers myself, and became more *frequent* and *earnest,* and, I trust, more *spiritual,* than heretofore, in my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven.

About this time, after many delays, I complied with the admonitions of my conscience, and disengaged myself from all other employments, with a solemn resolution to leave all my temporal concerns in the hands of the Lord, and entirely to devote myself to the work of the ministry. Being thus become master of all my time, I dropped every other study, and turned the whole current of my reflections and inquiries, into another channel; and for several years I scarcely opened a book which treated of any thing besides religion.

The first step I took after this disengagement, was to keep *common-place books;* one I had for noting down remarkable passages out of other authors; and another for collecting into one view, every text I could meet with in Scripture respecting the most important and controverted doctrines of the

Digitized by Google

gospel. Though I held this but a short time, (for when my engagements multiplied, I dropt it,) yet I found it very useful in bringing me acquainted with many passages of the word of God, to which I had not hitherto much attended; and it prepared the way for writing my sermons on doctrinal subjects, with the scriptural testimonies concerning the point in hand, in one view before me.

In *January* 1777, I met with a very high commendation of Mr Hooker's writings, in which the honourable appellation of *Judicious* was bestowed upon him. This excited my curiosity to read his works, which accordingly I did with great profit. In his "*Discourse on Justification*," (Edit. 1682. p. 496), I met with the following remarkable passage, which, as well for its excellency as for the effect it had upon my religious views, I shall, though rather long, transcribe. "If our hands did never offer violence to our brethren, a bloody thought doth prove us murderers before him [God.] If we had never opened our mouth to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our secret cogitations is heard in the ears of God. If we did not commit the sins which, daily and hourly, in deed, word, or thoughts, we do commit, yet in the good things which we do, how many defects are there intermingled! God, in that which is done, respecteth the mind and intention of the doer. Cut off then all those things wherein we have regarded our own glory; those things which men do to please men, and to satisfy our own liking; those things which we do by any respect, not sincerely, and purely for the love of God; and a small score will serve for the number of our righteous deeds. Let the holiest and best thing we do be now considered:—we are never better affected unto God than when we pray: yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! how little reverence do we show unto the grand Majesty of God unto whom we speak! how little remorse of our own miseries! how little taste of the sweet influence of his tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, "Call upon me," he had set us a very burdensome task? It may seem somewhat extreme which I will speak; therefore let every one judge of it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and no otherwise. I will but only make a demand: if God should yield unto us, not as unto *Abraham*, if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes the city should not be destroyed; but, and if he should make us an offer thus large:—Search all the generations of men, since the fall of our father *Adam*; find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all; and for that one man's action only, neither men nor angels shall feel the torments which are prepared for both: Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things which we do, have somewhat in them to be pardoned; how then can we do any thing meritorious, or worthy to be rewarded? Indeed, God doth liberally promise whatsoever appertaineth to a blessed life, to as many as sincerely keep his law, though they be not exactly able to keep it. Wherefore we acknowledge a dutiful necessity of doing well, but the meritorious dignity of doing well, we utterly renounce. We see how far we are from the perfect righteousness of the law; the little fruit which we have in holiness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt and unsound: we put no confidence at all in it; we challenge nothing in the world for it; we dare not call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt-books. Our continual suit to him is, and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences."

I had no sooner read this passage, than I acquired such an insight into the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, and the perfection which a just and holy God, according to that law, cannot but require in all the services of his reasonable creatures; that I clearly perceived my very best duties, on which my main dependence had hitherto been placed, to be merely specious sins; and my whole life appeared to be one continued series of

Digitized by Google

transgression. I now understood the apostle's meaning, when he affirms, that "By the works of the law can no flesh be justified before God. All my difficulties in this matter vanished; all my distinctions and reasonings about the meaning of the words *law* and *justification*, with all my borrowed criticisms upon them, failed me at once. I could no longer be thus amused; for I was convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that all men were so notoriously transgressors of every law of God, that no man could possibly be justified in his sight by his obedience to any of the divine commandments. I was sensible that if God should call me into judgment before him, according to the strictness of his perfect law, for the best duty I ever performed, and for nothing else, I must be condemned as a transgressor; for when weighed in these exact balances, it would be found wanting. Thus I was effectually convinced, that if ever I were saved, it must be in some way of unmerited mercy and grace, though I did not clearly understand in what way, till long after. Immediately, therefore, I took for my next text Gal. iii. 22. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe." And I preached from it according to Hooker's doctrine; expressing, as strongly as I could, the defilements of our best actions, and our need of mercy in every thing we do; in order the more evidently to shew that "salvation is of grace, through faith;—not of works, lest any man should boast."

I had not, however, as yet attained to a knowledge of the fulness of that fountain, whence all these polluted streams flow forth so plentifully into our lives and conversation.—Neither was I then able to receive the following nervous passage concerning justification: (Hooker, page 495); "The righteousness wherein we must be found, if we will be justified, is not our own; therefore we cannot be justified by any inherent quality. Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God findeth us, if we be faithful; for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man which is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of sin; him, being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repentance, him God beholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin by not imputing it; taketh quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it; and accepteth him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded in the law. Shall I say, *more* perfectly righteous than if himself had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what I say; but the apostle saith, "*God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" Such we are in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God himself. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, whatsoever, it is our comfort, and our wisdom; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made himself the Son of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God."

Equally determinate and expressive are these words (page 500): "As for such as hold, with the Church of Rome, that we cannot be saved by Christ alone without works, they do, not only by a circle of consequence, but directly, deny the foundation of faith; they hold it not, no not so much as by a thread." If the *Judicious Hooker's* judgment may in this important concern be depended upon, (and I suppose it will not easily be proved erroneous,) I fear the foundation of faith is held by only a small part of that Church which has honoured her champion with this distinction.

Pages 508 and 509, he thus defends his doctrine against the objections of the *Papists*, (for at that time none but the *Papists* openly objected to it.) "It is a childish cavil wherewith, in the matter of justification, our adversaries do so greatly please themselves, exclaiming that we tread all Christian virtues under our feet, and require nothing of Christians but faith; because we teach that faith alone justifieth. Whereas, by this speech, we never meant to exclude either hope, or charity, from being always joined, as in-

Digitized by Google

separable mates with faith in the man that is justified; or works from being added, as necessary duties, required at the hands of every justified man: but to shew that faith is the only hand which putteth on Christ unto justification; and Christ the only garment, which, being so put on, covereth the shame of our defiled natures, hideth the imperfections of our works, preserveth us blameless in the sight of God; before whom, otherwise, the weakness of our faith were cause sufficient to make us culpable; yea, to shut us out from the kingdom of heaven, where nothing that is not absolute can enter."

Had I at this time met with such passages in the writings of the *Dissenters*, or in any of those modern publications which, under the brand of *Methodistical*, are condemned without reading, or perused with invincible prejudice, I should not have thought them worth regard, but should have rejected them as wild enthusiasm. But I knew that Hooker was deemed perfectly orthodox, and a standard-writer, by the prelates of the church in his own days. I learned from his dispute with Mr Travers, that he was put upon his defence, for making concessions in this matter to the Church of Rome, which the zealous *Protestants* did not think warrantable; and that he was judged by the more rigid, too lax in his doctrine, by none too rigid. I had never heard it insinuated that he was tinctured with enthusiasm; and the solidity of his judgment, and the acuteness of his reasoning faculties, need no voucher to the attentive reader. His opinion, therefore, carried great weight with it; made me suspect the truth of my former sentiments; and put me upon serious inquiries and deep meditation on this subject, accompanied with earnest prayers for the teaching and direction of the Lord on this important point. The result was, that after many objections and doubts, and much examination of the word of God, in a few months I began to accede to Mr Hooker's sentiments. And at the present, my opinion, in this respect, as far as I know, coincides with these passages of this eminent author, and is supported and vindicated by the same arguments: he, therefore, who would prove our doctrine of *justification by faith alone* to be an error, will do well to answer in the first place these quotations from Mr Hooker.

Indeed, as far as I can understand him, there is scarcely any doctrine which, with no inconsiderable offence, I now preach, that is not evidently contained in his writings as in my sermons. Witness particularly his "*Sermon of the certainty and perpetuity of faith in the elect;*" in which the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers, is expressly taught and scripturally maintained: and he closes it with this noble triumph of full assurance, as resulting from that comfortable doctrine in the hearts of confirmed and experienced Christians: "I know in whom I have believed;" "I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for me; I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto him I commit myself. His own finger hath engraven this sentence on the tables of my heart." "*Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not.*" "Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end, and by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it." (page 532.)—With such words in my mouth, and such assurance in my heart, I wish to live, and hope to die.

The insertion of these quotations from this old author will, I hope, need no apology. Many have not his works, and these extracts are worthy of their perusal; others, from these specimens, may be prevailed with to read, what perhaps hath hitherto been an unnoticed book in their studies. Especially I recommend to those who admire him as the champion of the external order and discipline of the church, and who willingly allow him the honour of being distinguished by the epithet *Judicious*, that they would attentively read, and impartially consider his doctrine. This would put an effectual stop to those declamations that, either ignorantly or maliciously, are made against the very doctrines, as novel inventions, which have just now been explained and defended in Mr Hooker's own words. For my part,

Digitized by Google

though I acknowledge that he advances many things I should be unwilling to subscribe, yet I heartily bless God that at this time I read him: the first material alteration that took place in my views of the gospel, being in consequence of it.

One more quotation I shall make, and so take my leave of him. Addressing himself (in his 2nd "*Sermon on part of St Jude's Epistle,*") to the pastors who are appointed to feed the chosen in Israel, he says (page 552,) "If there be any feeling of Christ, any drop of heavenly dew, or any spark of God's good Spirit within you, stir it up; be careful to build and edify, first yourselves, and then your flocks in this most holy faith. I say, *first yourselves;* for he who will set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ, must himself burn with love. It is want of faith in ourselves, my brethren, which makes us retchless (careless) in building others. We forsake the Lord's inheritance, and feed it not. What is the reason of this? Our own desires are settled where they should not be. We ourselves are like those women who have a longing to eat coals, and lime, and filth: we are fed, some with honour, some with ease, some with wealth: the gospel waxeth loathsome and unpleasant in our taste: how should we then have a care to feed others with that, which we cannot fancy ourselves? If faith wax cold and slender in the heart of the prophet, it will soon perish from the ears of the people." It is not needful to add any reflections upon this passage, every one will readily make them for himself: we are however reminded of *Solomon's* words, (Eccl. i. 9, 10.) "There is no new thing under the sun; is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time which was before us. (Eccl. iii. 15.) That which hath been, is now; and that which is to be, hath already been."

To my shame be it spoken, though I had twice subscribed the *Articles*, which allow the book of *Homilies* to be sound and wholesome doctrine, I had never yet seen them, and understood not what that doctrine was. But being at length engaged in a serious inquiry after truth, and *Hooker's* works having given me a more favourable opinion of these old authors, I was inclined to examine them, and I read part of the book with some degree of attention. And though many things seemed hard sayings, that I could not receive; yet others were made very useful to me, especially concerning justification. In short, I perceived that the very doctrine which I had hitherto despised as Methodistical, was indisputably the standard-doctrine of the established Church, when the homilies were composed; and consequently that it is so still; for they have lost none of their authority, (however fallen into disrepute,) with those who subscribe the thirty-nine articles. This weakened my prejudice, though it did not prove the doctrine true.

About this time a new and unexpected effect was produced by my preaching. I had hitherto been satisfied to see people regularly frequent the church, listen attentively to what was discoursed, and lead moral decent lives. The way in which I had been led was so smooth, and the progress I had made so gradual; I had lately experienced so little *distressing* concern for my own soul, and had so little acquaintance with persons conversant in these matters; that while I declared the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God in an alarming manner, it never occurred to me that my hearers might not proceed in the same easy gradual way. But I had scarcely begun this new method of preaching, when application was made to me by persons in great distress about their souls; for, their consciences being awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practice, they were anxious in inquiring what they must do to be saved. I knew not well what to say to them, my views being greatly clouded, and my sentiments concerning justification very much perplexed: but being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them in a general way to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; though I was incapable of instructing them either concerning the true nature of faith, or in what manner they were to seek it. However, I better understood my own meaning, when I advised

Digitized by Google

them to the study of the Scriptures, accompanied with prayer to God to be enabled rightly to understand them, and when I inculcated amendment of life. In this manner the Lord slowly brought them forward: and though, for want of a better instructor, they were a considerable time before they arrived at establishment in the faith; yet some of them, having their minds less leavened with prejudice and the pride of reasoning, were more apt scholars in the school of Christ than I was, and got the start of me in the knowledge both of doctrine and duty; and in their turns became, without intending it, in some respects monitors to me, and I derived important advantage from them.

This singular circumstance, of being an instrument in bringing others earnestly and successfully to inquire after salvation, while I so little understood the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, very much increased my perplexity. I became doubly earnest to know the truth, lest I should mislead those who confided their precious souls to me as their spiritual instructor. This added to my diligence in reading and meditating on the word of God; and made me more fervent in prayer to be guided to the knowledge of the truth. And under every difficulty, I constantly had recourse unto the Lord, to preserve me from ignorance and error, and to enable me to distinguish between the doctrines of his word, and the inventions and traditions of men.

About this time I established a weekly Lecture for expounding the Scriptures in my other parish, by which I obtained further acquaintance with the various parts of the word of God. It was my general practice, in penning these Lectures, to search out all the texts referred to in the margin of the Bible, with such as I could recollect upon the subject, and to make use of them in explaining each other. This method enabled me to store my memory with the language of Scripture; and made way for a greater exactness in discussing doctrinal subjects, than I had hitherto been acquainted with.

In the course of the winter, 1777, I was engaged in deep meditation upon Luke xi. 9—13, concerning the Holy Spirit being given in answer to prayer. And at length, having made a collection of all the Scriptures I could meet with, which related to that important doctrine, diligently comparing them together, and meditating upon them, and earnestly beseeching the Lord to fulfil the promise to my soul, I wrote two sermons upon the subject:—one from Luke xi. 13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." The other from James i. 16, 17. "Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." By this, my views of a Christian's privileges and duties in this respect, were much enlarged, and my requests were made known unto the Lord in a more full, exact, and believing manner, than before. Though I still remained very ignorant in many important matters respecting the person, offices, and work of the Holy Spirit, yet I had discovered more of what was promised concerning him, and therefore knew better what to ask.

My obligations to Bishop Beveridge must here be acknowledged. When I first began to peruse his sermons, I conceived a mean opinion of him; and it was some time before I could prevail with myself to examine any further into his writings: but being now more advanced in my inquiry after truth, those singularities which at first offended me became tolerable, and I began to relish the simplicity, spirituality, love of Christ, and affection for souls, which eminently shine forth in many parts of his works. Indeed, I received considerable instruction from him; but especially his sermon on the real satisfaction made by the death of Christ for the sins of believers, was the blessed means of clearing up my views, and confirming my faith, respecting that fundamental doctrine of Christianity. On *Good Friday*, 1777, I preached a sermon upon that subject, from Isaiah liii. 6. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid [hath caused to meet] on him the iniquities of us all." I endeavoured to

Digitized by Google

prove, (what has ever since been the sole foundation of all my hopes,) that Christ indeed bore the sins of all who should ever truly believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment, in his own body on the tree. I explicitly avowed my belief, that Christ, as our Surety and Bondsman, stood in our law-place, to answer all our obligations, and to satisfy divine justice and the demands of the law for our offences: and I publicly renounced, as erroneous and grievous perversions of Scripture, all my former explanations and interpretations of these subjects.

This was the first doctrine in which I was clearly and fully brought to acknowledge the truth; though I had, with no little earnestness, for two years been inquiring about it:—to so astonishing a degree was my blinded understanding filled with prejudice against the doctrines of the word of God! Hitherto they had been foolishness to me; but now, under the divine teaching, I began, though *very dimly*, to discern the wisdom of God in them.

I say *dimly*; for I was still under many and great mistakes, and very ignorant in many important points. I knew sin to be the transgression of the divine law; but I did not perceive its odious deformity, as deliberate rebellion against God's sovereign authority, and an express contradiction to his holy nature; as charging God foolishly, with the want of either wisdom or goodness, in laying such restraints upon the inclinations of his creatures; and as tending to overturn all subordination in the universe, and to introduce anarchy, confusion, and misery into the whole creation. I had discovered that my best *actions* were defiled; but I understood not that this was the effect of a depraved nature, and a polluted heart. The doctrine of Original Sin, as the fruitful root of these multiplied evils, was as yet no part of my creed. Inconsistently, I was an *Arian*, or a *Clarkist*, in my sentiments concerning the person of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Some faint conception I had formed of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the soul: the beginnings of it I little understood: and I continued to entertain an implacable enmity to the doctrine of election, and the truths more intimately connected with it. But my faith was now fixed upon a crucified Saviour, (though I dishonoured his person and denied his Deity), and I had a sincere desire of being devoted to the Lord. He therefore in mercy accepted his own work in my heart, and pardoned all that was mine; and at length extricated me from that labyrinth of perplexities and inconsistencies in which I was entangled.

About this time, in the course of my lectures, our Lord's discourse with *Nicodemus* came again under my consideration. Notwithstanding much meditation and many prayers, I could not satisfy my mind about it. I was convinced some internal change must be implied in the expressions "born again," and "born of the Spirit;" and, according to what I had experienced, I endeavoured to explain it; but I was still very confused in my views of that important subject, and had many doubts whether I were right or wrong in what I advanced.

Hitherto, excepting Leland "*On the Deistical Writers*," I had not read any book written by a *Dissenter*, with the least degree of candour and attention; but at this crisis I met with the first volume of Dr Evans' sermons, entitled, "*The Christian Temper*." I was induced to read it by the recommendation of a friend; but, (such was my proud foolish heart!) I opened it with great prejudice, because I understood that the author was a *Dissenter*. However, this book came with a blessing: for by perusing it, I at length perceived that fallen man, both body and soul, is indeed carnal and sold under sin; that by nature, in every man living, the reasonable and immortal part is destitute of *spirituality*, immersed in matter, and, by a dishonourable and miserable prostitution, given up "to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof;" and, that man must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, new created unto good works, born of the Spirit of God, made partaker of a new and divine nature, before he can possibly be made meet for, or admitted into the kingdom of God. In a very little time all

Digitized by Google

my difficulties about this matter vanished, and the truth became so exceedingly plain and evident, that, until I had made the experiment, I could scarcely be persuaded, but that every person who heard it rightly explained, must assent to it. This doctrine I have ever since invariably preached, with good effect, I trust, "in opening the eyes of sinners, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Acts xxvi. 28.

When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with Mr Newton was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence in *December* 1775, till *April* 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company; I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor; and I was unwilling the world should think us in any way connected. But under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend, though not as now rejoiced to *call* him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company: but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period, I once heard him preach; but still it was foolishness to me, his sermon being principally upon the believer's experience, in some particulars with which I was unacquainted: so that though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical notions, and strenuously insisted that we should never think alike, till we met in heaven.

All along in the progress of this inquiry, I grew more and more concerned about my character. I saw myself continually verging nearer and nearer to that scheme of doctrine which the world calls *Methodism;* nor could I help it without doing violence to my convictions. I had indeed set out with the *avowed*, and I trust *sincere*, resolution of seeking the truth as impartially as possible; and of embracing it wherever I might find it, without respect to interest, reputation, or any worldly consideration whatever. I had taken patiently, and sustained comfortably, the loss of my opening prospect of preferment, I trust mainly from the supports of grace, and the consciousness of having acted with integrity; yet I am not sure but my deceitful heart might also derive some support from a vain imagination that my character would be no loser. Ambitious thirst after the praise of men was much more my peculiar corruption than covetousness; and I had been in no ordinary degree proud of my natural understanding. I had been accustomed to hear the people called *Methodists* mentioned with contempt, as ignorant and deluded, as fools, and sometimes as madmen; and that with no small degree of complacency and self-preference, I too had despised them as weak enthusiasts. But I now began to be apprehensive that the tables were about to be turned upon me. If I professed and taught these doctrines, I must no longer be considered as a man of sober understanding, but as one of those persons whose heads, being naturally weak, had been turned by religious studies; and who, having fallen under the power of enthusiasm, had become no better than fools or madmen.

This was the sharpest trial I passed through: for I had not yet learned, that "when we are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are we." Nor did I remember, with due consideration of the reasons assignable for so extraordinary a circumstance, that the apostles were "fools for Christ's sake;" were deemed "beside themselves;" and went "through evil report and good report, as deceivers, and yet true;" that they were "every where spoken against," as "the men that turned the world upside down;" were treated as vain babblers," and "accounted the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things." I did not consider that Jesus himself, the "brightness of the Father's glory," the "Word and Wisdom of God," who "went about doing good," and "spake as never man spake," was not only rejected,

Digitized by Google

but despised as not worth hearing, as "one that had a devil," as in league with the devil, as "a blasphemer," "a *Samaritan*," "a madman," yea, "a devil." I read, indeed, but my understanding was not yet opened to understand such plain Scriptures as these: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, *therefore* the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his Lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John xv. 19, 28.) "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house *Beelzebub*, how much more shall they call them of the household?" (Matth. x. 24, 25.) "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely* for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." Matth. v. 11, 12.) Not being aware of these consequences when my resolution was first formed, I was as one who has begun to build without counting the cost; and was greatly disturbed when I saw the favourite idol of my proud heart, my character, in such imminent danger.

It must be supposed that this apprehension would make me cautious what doctrines I admitted into my creed; and, unwilling to be convinced that those things were true and important, the profession of which was sure to bring infamy on my character; and that even after the fullest conviction, I should thus be rendered very careful in what manner I preached them. In general, however, though the conflict was sharp, I was enabled to be faithful. The words "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel," were commonly upon my mind when I penned my sermon, and when I entered the pulpit: and though, when a bold declaration of what I believed to be the truth, with an offensive application of it to the consciences of my hearers, drew opposition and calumny upon me, I have secretly resolved to be more circumspect the next time; yet, when that time came, my heart and conscience being both engaged, I dared not to conceal one tittle of what appeared to me to be true, and to promise usefulness. But while, with perturbation of mind, and with many disquieting apprehensions, I declared the message with which I supposed myself to be intrusted; to screen myself from the charge of *Methodism*, and to soften the offence, I was frequently throwing out slighting expressions, and bringing the charge of enthusiasm against those who preached such doctrines as I was not yet convinced of. On the other hand, my concern about my character quickened me very much in prayer, and increased my diligence in searching the Scriptures, that I might be sure I was not, at this expense, preaching "cunningly devised fables," instead of feeding the souls committed to my care with the unadulterated milk of evangelical truth.

In this state of mind, which is more easily understood by experience than description, I met with Mr Venn's *Essay on the prophecy of Zecharias*, (Luke i. 67—79.) I was no stranger to the character he bore in the eyes of the world, and did not begin to read this book with great alacrity or expectation: however, the interesting subjects treated of engaged my attention, and I read it with great seriousness, and some degree of impartiality. I disapproved indeed of many things; but the truth and importance of others brought conviction both to my understanding and conscience: especially, I found a word in season, respecting my foolish and wicked shame and attention to character, in inquiring after divine truth, and in the performance of the important duties of a gospel-minister. These solemn words in particular came home to my heart: "If the spirit of the world, pride, carelessness respecting the soul, and neglect of Christ, be not hateful to God and destructive to men, the gospel (with reverence I speak it) is an imposition. Do you abhor that thought as blasphemy? Abhor as much a fawning upon Christ from year to year in your closet, calling him there your Lord and God, and then coming out to consult the world how far they will allow you to obey his plain

Digitized by Google

commands, without saying you are a *Methodist*. Cease rather to profess any allegiance to Christ, than treat him, under professions of duty, with such contempt. "I would," said he to the Church of *Laodicea*, "thou wert cold or hot;" but "because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Page 85.)

I should as easily be convinced that there was no Holy Ghost, as that he was not present with my soul when I read this passage, and the whole of what Mr Venn has written upon the subject. It came to my heart with such evidence, conviction, and demonstration, that it lifted me up above the world, and produced that victory which faith alone can give, and that liberty which uniformly attends the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. I became at once ashamed of my base ingratitude and foolish fears, and was filled with such consolation and rejoicing, even in the prospect of sacrificing my character, and running the risk of infamy and contempt, as made me entirely satisfied on that head: and, some few seasons of unbelief excepted, I have never since been much troubled about being called an *Enthusiast* or a *Methodist*.

But while I was thus delivered from the dread of unmerited reproaches, I continued as much as ever afraid of *real enthusiasm;* nay, I became continually more and more averse to every thing which can justly bear that name: so that the nearer I verged to what I had ignorantly supposed to be enthusiastical, the more apprehensive I was, lest my earnestness in such interesting inquiries, and the warmth of my natural spirits, thus occasionally increased, should put me off my guard, and betray me into delusions and mistakes. From this danger I could however obtain no security, but by keeping close to the study of the word of God; and by being earnest and particular in praying to be preserved from error, and to be enabled to distinguish between the pure revelations of the Holy Spirit contained in Scripture, and the inventions of men, the imaginations of my own heart, or the delusions of the spirit of lies.

The Doctrine of a Trinity of co-equal persons in the Unity of the Godhead had been hitherto no part of my creed. I had long been accustomed to despise this great mystery of godliness. I had first quarrelled with the articles of the established Church about this doctrine: I had been very decided and open in my declarations against it; and my unhumbled reason still retained many objections to it. But about *June* 1777, I began to be troubled with doubts about my own sentiments, and to suspect the truth of Dr Clarke's hypothesis. I had just read Mr Lindsey's *Apology* and *Sequel*.—Before I saw these tracts, I had even ridiculed those who thought of confuting him on the *orthodox scheme*, and was not without thoughts of maintaining Dr Clarke's system against him. But when I understood that he claimed Dr Clarke as a *Socinian*, I was extremely surprised, and, in consequence, was led again to a more serious and anxious consideration of the subject. Yet, the more I studied, the more I was dissatisfied. Many things now first occurred to me as strong objections against my own sentiments; and, being thus perplexed, and unable to form a scheme for myself, I easily perceived that I was not qualified to dispute with another person. My pride and my convictions struggled hard for the victory: I was very unwilling to become a *Trinitarian in the strict sense of the word*, though, in *my own sense*, I had for some time pretended to be one; and yet the more I considered it, the more I was dissatisfied with all other systems. My esteem for Mr Newton was also now very much increased; and though I had hitherto concealed this part of my sentiments from him, yet I knew his to be very different. I was not indeed willing to be taught by him in other matters: yet, in this respect, finding his opinion the same which in all former ages of the Church hath been accounted orthodox, while that which I held had always been branded as heretical; my fears of a mistake were thus exceedingly increased. In this perplexity I applied to the Lord, and frequently besought him to lead me to a settled conclusion what was the truth in this important subject. After much meditation, together with a careful examination of all the Scriptures

Digitized by Google

which I then understood to relate to it, accompanied with earnest prayer for divine teaching, I was at length constrained to renounce, as utterly indefensible, all my former sentiments, and to accede to that doctrine which I had so long despised. I saw, and I could no longer help seeing, that the offices and works, attributed in Scripture to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, are such as none but the infinite God could perform: that it is a contradiction to believe the *real*, and consequently *infinite*, satisfaction to divine justice made by the death of Christ, without believing him to be "very God of very God:" nor could the Holy Ghost give spiritual life, and dwell in the hearts of all believers at the same time, to adapt his work of convincing, enlightening, teaching, strengthening, sanctifying, and comforting to the several cases of every individual, were he not the omniscient, omnipresent, infinite God. Being likewise certain, from reason as well as from Scripture, that there is not, and cannot be more Gods than one; I was driven from my reasonings, and constrained to submit my understanding to divine revelation; and, allowing that the incomprehensible God alone can fully know the unsearchable mysteries of his own divine nature, and the manner of his own existence, to adopt the doctrine of a "Trinity in Unity," among other reasons of still greater moment, in order to preserve consistency in my own scheme. It was, however, a considerable time before I was disentangled from my embarrassments on this subject.

Hitherto my prejudices against Mr Hervey, as a writer upon doctrinal subjects, had been very strong. I thought him a very pious man, and I had read with pleasure some parts of his *Meditations;* yet, looking on him as an enthusiast, I had no curiosity to read any other of his writings. But, about *July*, 1777, I providentially met with his *Theron and Aspasio;* and, opening the book, I was much pleased with the first passage on which I cast my eye. This engaged me to read the whole with uncommon attention: nor did I, in twice perusing it, meet with any thing contrary to my own sentiments, without immediately beseeching the Lord to guide me to the truth; I trust the Lord heard and answered these prayers; for, though I could not but dissent from him (as I still do) in some few things; yet I was both instructed and convinced by his arguments and illustrations in every thing relative to our fallen, guilty, lost, and helplessly miserable state by nature; and the way and manner in which the believer is accounted, and accepted as righteous, in the presence of a just, holy, and heart-searching, a faithful and unchangeable God: especially his animated description and application of the stag-chase, cleared up this important matter to my mind, more than any thing I had hitherto met with upon the subject.

I had now acceded to most of the doctrines which at present I believe and preach; except the doctrine of personal election, and those tenets which immediately depend on it, and are connected with it. These were still foolishness to me: and, so late as *August*, 1777, I told my friend Mr N. that I was sure I never should be of his sentiments on that head. To this he answered, that if I never mentioned this subject, he never should, as we were now agreed in all he judged absolutely needful; but, that he had not the least doubt of my very shortly becoming a *Calvinist*, as I should presently discover my system of doctrine to be otherwise incomplete, and inconsistent with itself. Indeed, I had by this time so repeatedly discovered myself to be mistaken where I had been very confident, that I began to suspect myself in every thing, in which I entertained sentiments different from those with whom I conversed. This, however, did not influence me to take their opinions upon trust: but it disposed me more particularly and attentively to consider them; and in every perplexity to have recourse to the Lord, to be preserved from error, and guided to the truth.

About the same time also, I began to have more frequent applications made to me by persons under deep concern for their souls. My heart was much interested in this new employment; as I was greatly concerned to see their pressing anxieties, and to hear their doubts, difficulties, and objections

Digitized by Google

against themselves: and, being sincerely desirous to give them good instruction, and to lead them on to establishment and comfort, I felt my deficiency, and seemed to have no ground to go on, nor any counsel to give them, but what, instead of relieving them, led them into greater perplexity. In this case, I earnestly besought the Lord to teach me what word in season to speak unto them.

While I was thus circumstanced, I read Witsius' *Economy of the Covenants*, and observed what use he made of the doctrine of election for this very purpose. This convinced me that the doctrine, *if true*, would afford that ground of encouragement which the people wanted. They had been awakened from ignorant formality, open ungodliness and vice, or entire carelessness about religion, to an earnest and anxious inquiry after salvation; they appeared truly penitent, and real believers, and heartily desirous of cleaving unto the Lord; and they wanted some security that they should not, through the deceitfulness of their hearts, their weakness, the entanglements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, fall back again into their former course of sin. This, if genuine, was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: and if wrought in consequence of the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God respecting them, it would follow, from the entire and undeserved freeness of this first gift bestowed on them, when neither desiring nor seeking it, but while in a state of enmity and rebellion against God, and neglect of his service, and from his unchangeableness in his purpose, and faithfulness to his promises, that he would assuredly carry on and complete the good work of his grace, and keep them by his power, as in a castle, through faith unto salvation.

Having now discovered one use of this doctrine, which before I objected to as useless and pernicious, I was led to consider how the other objections which I had been accustomed to urge against it, might be answered. It is true, I now began to consider it as a mystery, not to be comprehended, nor yet too curiously to be searched into by man's natural reason; but humbly received by faith, just as far as it is plainly revealed in God's unerring word. I was therefore constrained to leave many objections unanswered, or to resolve them into the incomprehensible nature of God, whose judgments and counsels are, as the great deep, unfathomable; and into the sovereignty of God, who doeth what he will with his own, and gives no account of any of his matters, let who will presume to find fault; and into his declarations, that his thoughts and ways are as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth. Here I left the matter, conscious, at length, that such knowledge was too high for me: and that, if God had said it, it was not my place to cavil against it. I acknowledge this way of proceeding is not very satisfactory to man's proud curiosity, who would be as God, and know all that God knows; and who even dares to dispute with him! and there are times when I can hardly acquiesce in such a solution. But surely it is highly becoming the dependent state and limited understanding of the creature, to submit the decision of all such high points implicitly to the award of the infinitely wise Creator. Indeed, the Christian religion expressly requires it of us; for our Lord declares, that "Except we receive the kingdom of God" (not as disputing philosophers, but) "as a little child, we shall in no wise enter therein." The day is coming when we shall be able to answer all objections. Here "we walk by faith," "and see in part, through a glass, darkly;" "hereafter we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known."*

* The doctrine of *personal election to eternal life*, when properly stated, lies open to no objection, which may not likewise, with equal plausibility, be urged against the conduct of God in placing one nation in a more favourable condition than another, especially as to religious advantages;—without the previous good or bad behaviour of either of them, or any *discernible reasons for the preference*. In both cases we may say, *Unmerited favour* to one person or people, is no *injustice to others*; and the infinitely wise God hath many reasons for his determinations, which we cannot discern, and which he deigns not to make known to us.

If sinners *deserve* the punishment inflicted on them, it cannot be *unjust* in the great Governor of the world to *pre-determine* their condemnation to it. The contrariety to justice and goodness, if there be

Digitized by Google

Leaving therefore all difficulties of a metaphysical nature to be cleared up in that world of light and knowledge, I began to consider the abuses of this doctrine, which I had always looked upon as a very formidable objection against it. But I soon discovered, that though ungodly men, who make profession of religion, will turn the grace of God into licentiousness; yet we might so explain and guard these doctrines, that none could thus abuse them, without being conscious of it, and so detecting their own hypocrisy. It still indeed appeared probable to me, that the preaching of them might at first occasion some trouble of mind to a few well-disposed persons: but I considered, that by a cautious declaration, and contrasting them with the general promises of the Gospel to all who believe, this might in a great measure be prevented; at the worst, a little personal conversation with such persons, would seldom, if ever, fail to satisfy them, and enable them in general to derive encouragement from them: while the unsettling of the minds of such persons as are carelessly living in an unconverted state, is the great end of all our preaching to them; and therefore we need not fear any bad effect of this doctrine in that respect. The great question therefore was, Are these doctrines in the Bible, or not? Hitherto I had wilfully passed over or neglected, or endeavoured to put some other construction upon all those parts of Scripture which directly speak of them: but now I began to consider, meditate, and pray over them; and I soon found that I could not support my former interpretations. They *would* teach Predestination, Election, and Final Perseverance, in spite of all my twisting and expounding. It also occurred to me, that these doctrines, though now in disgrace, were universally believed and maintained by our venerable reformers; that they were admitted, at the beginning of the reformation, into the creeds, catechisms, or articles, of every one of the *Protestant* churches; that our articles and homilies expressly maintained them; and consequently that a vast number of wise and sober-minded men, who in their days were burning and shining lights, had upon mature deliberation, agreed, not only that they were true, but that they ought to be admitted as useful, or even as necessary articles of faith, by every one who deemed himself called to take upon him the office of a Christian minister.

any, must certainly be found in the Lord's *actual dealings with his creatures*, and not *in his pre-determinations thus to deal with them*. It could not be inconsistent with any of the divine attributes, for the Lord from all eternity to decree to act consistently with all of them. The clamours excited against *predestination*, if carefully scrutinized, are generally found to be against the *thing decreed*, and not against the circumstance of its *having been decreed from eternity*. The sovereignty of God, when duly considered, appears to be nothing more than infinite perfection determining and accomplishing every thing in the very best manner possible; and infallibly performing the counsels of everlasting knowledge and wisdom, justice, truth, and love; notwithstanding all the plans and designs of innumerable voluntary rational agents which might seem incompatible with them: nay, performing those counsels even by means of these voluntary agents, in perfect consistency with their free agency and unaccountableness; but in a manner which we are utterly incapable of comprehending.

We should scarcely object to this infinitely wise and holy sovereignty of God, however absolute, did we not, from consciousness of guilt and carnal enmity of heart, suspect that it might probably be found at variance with our happiness: and, I apprehend, should any man be fully persuaded that God had decreed his eternal happiness, however groundless that persuasion might be, he would find his aversion to the doctrine of election exceedingly abated by it. I have often observed that some persons, who declaim most vehemently against the Calvinistical doctrine of divine decrees, seem perfectly reconciled to predestination, when persuaded that God hath *eternally decreed the salvation of all men!* On the other hand, no consciously impenitent sinner is cordially reconciled to the general declarations of Scripture, concerning the everlasting misery of all impenitent sinners, whatever he may think about personal election.

In fact, the grand difficulty in the whole of the divine conduct, equally embarrasses every system of Christianity, and every scheme of Deism, except men deny that God is the Creator and Governor of the world. For wickedness and misery actually exist and abound; the fact is undeniable: the Almighty God could have prevented this; and we should have thought that infinite love would have preserved the creation from all evils of every description. Yet infinite Wisdom saw good to permit them to enter, and amazingly to prevail! Till this difficulty be completely solved, let none object to truths plainly revealed in Scripture, on account of similar difficulties. But let us remember, that our narrow capacities, and scanty information, do not qualify us to judge concerning what it becomes the infinite God to determine and to do; and let us adopt the language of the apostle on this subject.—"Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For *of him*, and *through him*, and *to him* are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen!" Rom. xi. 33—36.

As for the objections made to these doctrines, as inconsistent with free agency, accountableness, commands, invitations, calls to repentance, faith and holiness, and diligence in the use of the means, they *universally* and *altogether* arise from *misrepresentation* and *misapprehension* of the subject.—See the Author's *Sermon on Election and Final Perseverence, &c.*

Digitized by Google

In the course of this inquiry, I perceived that my system was incomplete without them. I believed that men, by nature born in sin, the children of wrath, and by wicked works the enemies of God, being in themselves ungodly and without strength, were saved of *free mercy and grace*, without having done any thing, more or less, to deserve it, through the Redeemer's righteousness and atonement, received by faith, the gift and operation of God; as born again, born of God, or new created unto good works, and to the divine image, by the power of the Holy Ghost. It now, therefore, occurred to me to inquire, from *what source* these precious blessings, thus freely flowing through the channel of redemption, to poor worthless sinners, could originally spring? And thus my mind was carried back from the consideration of the *effects*, to that of the *cause*; and from the promises made to fallen man, to the counsels and purposes of God which induced him to give those promises. I was engaged in frequent meditations on the divine omniscience, unchangeableness, and eternity; and the end which the all-sufficient God had in view in all his works, even the manifestation of the glory of his own perfections; and perceived that redemption itself, as planned by God, to whom were "known all his works from the beginning of the world," must be the result of his eternal purpose of displaying the glory of his mercy and grace, in harmonious consistency with his most awful justice and holiness; and thus manifesting the inexhaustible resources of his manifold wisdom, in glorifying at once all these attributes which, considered as *perfect*, seem to created understanding irreconcileable to each other. I considered that, until the fall of man and his redemption had manifested the attribute of mercy to sinners, it had, as far as we can learn, been unexercised and undisplayed, and consequently unknown to any but God himself, from all eternity; nor could he have the glory of it, but must have been considered as so perfect in justice and holiness, as to be incapble of mercy, had he not chosen some objects on whom to exercise it, and devised some method of displaying it in consistency with his other perfections. Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design, formed in God's eternal counsels, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures, complete and full orbed in all conceivable perfections. But as all have transgressed the divine law, and as none are disposed of themselves to embrace his humbling and holy Salvation, or even to inquire after it; so I was convinced that the merciful and gracious nature of God, the fountain of goodness, alone moved him to choose any of them as objects of his favourable regard; that his unconstrained will and pleasure are the only assignable causes of his choosing one rather than another; and that in fact the whole work was his own; his wisdom having devised the means; his love and all-sufficiency having, in the person, offices, and work of Christ, made all things ready; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation shall be sent; and his Holy Spirit alone inclining and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith. Hence I concluded that God, who knoweth the end from the beginning, and is a Sovereign, and, when none have deserved any thing, may do as he will with his own, actually "chose us," (even every individual believer,) "in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we *should* be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will: to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. i. 4—6.)

In short, though my objections were many, my anxiety great, and my resistance long, yet by the evidence which, both from the word of God and from my own meditation, crowded upon my mind, I was at length constrained to submit; and, God knoweth, with fear and trembling, to allow these formerly despised doctrines a place in my creed. Accordingly, about *Christmas*, 1777, I began cautiously to establish the truth of them, and to make use of them for the consolation of poor distressed and fearful believers. This was the only use I then knew of them, though I now see their influence on every part of evangelical truth.

Digitized by Google

However, I would observe that, though I assuredly believe these doctrines as far as here expressed, (for I am not willing to trace them any higher, by reasonings or consequences, into the unrevealed things of God,) and though I exceedingly need them in my view of religion, both for my own consolation, and security against the consequences of a deceitful heart, an ensnaring world, and a subtle temper, as also for the due exercise of my pastoral office: yet I would not be understood to place the acknowledgment of them upon a level with the belief of the doctrines before spoken of. I can readily conceive the character of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is either an utter stranger to the doctrines in question, or who, through misapprehension or fear of consequences, cannot receive them. But I own I find a difficulty in conceiving of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is a stranger to his own utterly lost condition, to the deceitfulness and depravity of his heart, to the *natural* alienation of his affections from God, and to the defilements of his best duties; who trusts, either in whole or in part, *allowedly*, to any thing for pardon and justification, except the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour, God manifested in the flesh; or who expects to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, in any other way than by being born again, created anew, converted and sanctified by the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Some time in *November*, 1777, I was, by a then unknown friend, furnished with a considerable number of books, written in general by the old divines, both of the Church of *England* and of the *Dissenters*. And, to my no small surprise, I found that those doctrines which are now deemed novel inventions, and are called *Methodistical*, are in these books every where discoursed of as known and allowed truths; and that the system which, despising to be taught by men, and unacquainted with such authors, I had for near three years together been *hammering* out for myself, with no small labour and anxiety, was to be found ready made to my hand in every book I opened.

I do not wonder that the members of the Church of *England* are generally prejudiced against the writings of *Dissenters*; for I have been so myself to an excessive degree. We imbibe this prejudice with the first rudiments of instruction, and are taught by our whole education to consider it as meritorious: though no doubt it is a prejudice of which every sincere inquirer after truth ought to be afraid, and every pretended inquirer ashamed; for how can we determine on which side truth lies, if we will not examine both sides? Indeed, it is well known to all those who are acquainted with the church-histories of those times, that till the reign of *James* I. there were no controversies between the established Church and the *Puritans*, concerning doctrine;—both parties being in all matters of importance of the same sentiments: they contended only about discipline and ceremonies, till the introduction of *Arminianism* gave occasion to the *Calvinists* being denominated *Doctrinal Puritans*. To this period all our church-writers were *Calvinistical* in doctrine; and even after that time many might be mentioned, who were allowed friends to the Church of *England*, that opposed those innovations, and agreed in doctrine with every thing above stated. Let it suffice, out of many, to recommend the works of Bishop Hall, especially his *Contemplations on the Life of Jesus*, a book not easily to be prized too highly; and Dr Reynold's works. To these no true friend to the Church of *England* can reasonably object, and in general, I believe and teach nothing but what they plainly taught before me.

The *outlines* of my scheme of doctrine were now completed; but I had been so taken up with doctrinal inquiries, that I was still, in a great measure, a stranger to my own heart, and had little experience of the power of the truths I had embraced. The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me; and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto, therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think any one, in the circle of my acquaintance, capable of giving me such information as I wanted. But,

Digitized by Google

being at length convinced that Mr N. had been right, and that I had been mistaken in the several particulars in which we had differed, it occurred to me that, having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers:—and I soon perceived the benefit; for from time to time the secrets of my heart were discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself; without having attained to a further acquaintance with my deficiences, weaknesses, corruptions and wants; or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching, and was convinced that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, "Except ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein." For though my proud heart is continually rebelling, and would fain build up again the former *Babel* of self-conceit, yet I trust I have from this time, in my settled judgment, aimed and prayed to be enabled to consider myself as a little child, who ought simply to sit at the Master's feet, to hear his words with profound submission, and wait his teaching with earnest desire and patient attention. From this time I have been enabled to consider those persons, in whom knowledge has been ripened by years, experience and observation, as fathers and instructors, to take pleasure in their company, to value their counsels, and with pleasure to attend their ministry.

Thus, I trust, the old building which I had purposed to repair, was pulled down to the ground, and the foundation of the new building of God laid aright: "Old things passed away, behold all things were become new." "What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ." My boasted reason I have discovered to be a blind guide, until humbled, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit of God: my former wisdom, foolishness: and that when I thought I knew much, I knew nothing as I ought to know. Since this period, every thing I have experienced, heard, or read, and every thing I observe around me, confirms and establishes me in the assured belief of those truths which I have received; nor do I in general any more doubt whether they be from God, than I doubt whether the sun shines, when I see its light, and am warmed with its refreshing beams. I see the powerful effects of them continually among those to whom I preach; I experience the power of them daily in my own soul; and, while by meditating on and "glorying in the cross of Christ, I find the world crucified unto me, and I unto the world,"—by preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified, I see notoriously immoral persons "taught by the saving grace of God to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," being examples to such as before they were a scandal to.

And now, by this change, the consequences of which I so much dreaded, what have I lost, even in respect of this present world?—Indeed, I have lost some degree of favour, and I escape not pity, censure, scorn, and opposition: but the Lord is introducing me to a new and far more desirable acquaintance; even to that of those whom the Holy Spirit hath denominated *the excellent of the earth;* nay, the Lord the Spirit condescends to be my Comforter. In general, I enjoy an established peace of conscience, through the blood of sprinkling, and continual application to the heavenly Advocate; with a sweet content, and "that peace of conscience which passeth all understanding," in "casting all my cares upon him who careth for me:" and

Digitized by Google

I am not left utterly without experience of that "joy which is unspeakable and full of glory." These the world could not give me, were I in favour with it; of these it cannot deprive me by its frowns. My desire henceforth, God knoweth, is to live to his glory, and by my whole conduct and conversation "to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour," and "to shew forth his praises, who hath called me out of darkness into his marvellous light;" to be in some way or other useful to his believing people, and to invite poor sinners who "are walking in a vain show, and disquieting themselves in vain," to "taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are who put their trust in him.—"

"Now would I tell to sinners round,
"What a dear Saviour I have found,
"Would point to his redeeming blood,
"And cry, Behold the way to God!"

Thus hath the Lord led me, a poor blind sinner, in a way that I knew not;—"he hath made darkness light before me, crooked things straight," and hard things easy, and hath brought me to a place of which I little thought when I set out; and having done these things for me, I believe, yea, I am undoubtedly sure, he will never leave me nor forsake me. To him be the glory of his undeserved and long-resisted grace: to me be the shame, not only of all my other sins, but also of my proud and perverse opposition to his purposes of love towards me. But all this was permitted, that my high spirit and proud heart being at length humbled and subdued, "I might remember, and be confounded, and never open my mouth any more, because of my shame, now that the Lord is pacified to me for all that I have done."

And now, as in the presence of the heart-searching Judge, I have given, without one wilful misrepresentation, addition, or material omission, an history of the great things God hath done for my soul; or if that suit not the reader's view of it, a history of that change which hath recently taken place in my religious sentiments and conduct, to the surprise of some, and perhaps the displeasure of others, among my former friends. The doctrines I have embraced are indeed charged with being destructive of moral practice, and tending to licentiousness: but though I know that my best righteousness are as filthy rags, yet I trust I may return thanks to God, that by his grace he hath so upheld me since this change took place, that I have not been permitted to disgrace the cause in which I have embarked, by any immoral conduct: "My rejoicing," in this respect, "is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God I have my conversation in the world." I can confidently avow, that the belief of these doctrines hath a quite contrary effect upon me. I most earnestly desire, aim, endeavour, and pray to be enabled to love God, and keep his commandments, without partiality and without hypocrisy;" and so to demean myself as by "well-doing, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." That I fall so very far short in every thing, is not the effect of my new doctrines, but of my old depraved nature and deceitful heart.—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!"

PART THIRD.

Observations on the Preceding Narrative.

My design in writing this account of myself, and my religious inquiries and change of sentiments, was this: I considered myself as a singular instance of a very unlikely person, in an uncommon manner, being led on from one thing to another, to embrace a system of doctrine which he once heartily de-

Digitized by Google

spised. As I assuredly believe that this change hath been effected under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, so I hoped that a circumstantial relation of it might be an encouragement and comfort to those who know and love the Lord, and from them levy a tribute of gratitude and praise to our gracious God: and that it also might be instrumental, by the convincing Spirit, to awaken others to a serious review of their religious sentiments; to put them upon the same earnest inquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus; and to influence them to the diligent use of the same blessed means, in which the Lord directed me to be found. I would therefore now offer a few observations on the preceding Narrative: and may the Lord guide both the writer, and every reader of these pages, to the saving knowledge of the truth, and into the ways of peace and righteousness.

I. It must be evident to every *unprejudiced* reader of this Narrative, that at the time this change commenced, I was, humanly speaking, a most unlikely person to embrace the system of doctrine above stated.—This will appear from the following considerations:—

1. My religious opinions had been for many years directly contrary to it. Being always of a reflecting turn of mind, I entertained exceedingly high notions of the power of human reason; and I had, upon *reasoning principles*, embraced a system of religion, which both soothed my conscience and flattered my self-conceit. After some trivial alterations, I seemed to myself, upon mature deliberation, to have come to a settled determination, and had bestowed considerable pains in making myself acquainted with those arguments and interpretations of Scripture, by which that system is usually defended: and I had ranked together many of those plausible objections and high charges, which are commonly brought by reasoning men against the doctrines and characters of the *Calvinists*. But I was in a great measure a stranger to what the *Calvinists* could say for themselves; because I thought the matter too plain to bear an argument, and therefore did not think their answers worth reading. In short, very few have been recovered from that abyss of error, (for so I must call it,) into which I had been permitted to sink. Full of confidence in my cause, and in the arguments with which I was prepared to support it, I was eager to engage in controversy with the *Calvinists*, and entertained the most sanguine hopes of victory: In this confidence I frequently harangued against them from the pulpit, and spared not to charge upon them consequences both absurd and shocking. Yet, after much, very much, anxious diligent inquiry, I have embraced, as the sacred truths of God's unerring word, every doctrine of this despised system!

2. My natural spirit and temper were very unfavourable to such a change. Few persons have ever been more self-sufficient and positive in their opinions, than I was. Fond to excess of entering into argument, I never failed on these occasions to betray this peculiarity of my character. I seldom acknowledged or suspected myself mistaken; and scarcely ever dropped an argument, till either my reasonings or obstinacy had silenced my opponent. A certain person once said of me, that I was like a stone rolling down a hill, which could neither be stopped nor turned: this witness was true; but those things which are impossible with man, are easy with God. I am evidently both stopped and turned: man, I am persuaded, could not have done it; but this hath God wrought, and I am not more a wonder to others than to myself. Indeed, I carried the same obstinate positive temper into my religious inquiries; for I never gave up one tittle of my sentiments till I could defend it no longer; nor ever submitted to conviction till I could no longer resist. The strong man armed with my natural pride and obstinacy, with my vain imaginations and reasonings, and high thoughts, had built himself many strong-holds, and kept his castle in my heart; and, when One stronger than he came against him, he stood a long siege: till, being by superior force driven from one to another, and all his armour in which he trusted being at length taken from him, he was constrained to recede. So that the Lord hav-

Digitized by Google

ing made me willing in the day of his power, I was forced to confess, "O Lord, thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed."

3. My situation in life rendered such a change improbable. I had an increasing family, no private fortune, a narrow precarious income, and no expectations, except from such friends as my conduct might procure or continue to me. I had unexpectedly contracted an acquaintance with some of those, whose favour goes a great way towards a man's advancement in life; nor was I insensible to the advantages to be hoped for, from cultivating by a compliant behaviour their kind and friendly regard to me. At the same time, I was no stranger to the opinion which the world entertain of those who preach these disreputable doctrines; and could not but conclude, that embracing them would probably deprive me of these prospects of preferment. But, as the result of diligent inquiry, I was assuredly convinced that it was my indispensable duty to profess and preach them, and that by so doing alone, I could ensure to myself the favour of a better Friend than any here below: and thus, while fully aware all along how unfavourable, *according to human probability*, it would prove to my worldly interests, I at length deliberately embraced them.

4. My regard to character was no trifling security against such a change of sentiment. I was ambitiously and excessively fond of that honour which cometh from man; and considered the desire of praise as allowable, nay, laudable. By this motive was I urged on to a very diligent prosecution of my studies, even beyond what natural inclination led me to; and my whole conduct was influenced by, my whole conversation was tinctured with, this vain-glorious aim. On the other hand, with approbation and self-complacency, I had been accustomed to bear the most contemptuous and opprobrious epithets liberally bestowed on those persons, to whom I have now joined myself: and all along, as I verged nearer and nearer to *Methodism*, I was painfully sensible that I was drawing upon myself the same mortifying distinctions. I have been a vain-glorious candidate for human applause: but I renounce such pretensions, and willingly submit to be considered by the world, under the mortifying character of a half-witted, crack-brained enthusiast. These epithets I am sensible are now bestowed upon me behind my back, nay, very often to my face: I bless God, however, this doth not move me; but I can heartily thank him, that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. But when I saw the trial approaching, it appeared very formidable; and I can truly affirm, that nothing but the fullest conviction, that the cause in which I was embarking was the cause of God, nothing, but not daring to act contrary to the plain dictates of my conscience, could have influenced me to make this sacrifice of my character, and bring upon myself so much scorn and contempt.

5. To reason with our despisers upon their own principles: if I am now fallen into enthusiasm, mistake, and strong delusion; I certainly was, when I first set out in this inquiry, a very unlikely person so to do. My leading resolve was to search for the truth diligently, and to embrace it wherever I found it, and whatever it might cost. No sooner had I begun the inquiry, than I was called upon to give proof of the sincerity of this resolution; and from a principle of conscience, though a mistaken one, I renounced my prospect of an immediate preferment; and it would be uncandid to question my *sincerity* after it had been thus evidenced. Since that time I have also deliberately sacrificed my character, and hazarded the loss of all my former friends. Giving these proofs of integrity, I set off in dependence on those plain promises which I have mentioned: I have sought this desired knowledge of the truth, chiefly in reading the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the manner which hath been related; and I am now led to conclusions diametrically opposite to what I expected! Now, lay all these things together, and attentively consider them, and then let your own consciences determine how far it is probable, that a person, in this manner seeking for the truth, should be given over to

Digitized by Google

a strong delusion to believe a pernicious lie. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Can any man suppose, that after such repeated and continued pleading, of the express promises of the Lord to this effect, in earnest prayer, according to his appointment, I should be delivered up to the teaching of the father of lies? Can any one make this conclusion without an evident insinuation that God hath broken his promises? In short, you may make a jest of the Narrative; you may throw by the book without giving any attention to an argument of this kind; you may say, what you never can prove, that it is all a contrived story; or you may argue, that these promises, though contained in the Bible, are not to be depended on *by us*, which is to give up the Scriptures to be scoffed at by *Infidels* and *Atheists*, and to render them useless to the humble anxious inquirer after truth and salvation; but by no other means, I am assured, can you account for this single circumstance, without allowing, that the substance of those doctrines, which I have now embraced, is indeed contained in the word of God; that they comprise the truth as it is in Jesus, and are not corrupted with any such delusion as can hazard the salvation of my soul, or the souls of those who by my ministry receive them.—On this supposition all difficulties vanish. The Lord had given me a sincere desire to know the saving doctrine of the gospel; and though I was exceedingly ignorant, obstinate, and prejudiced, yet this desire having, according to his direction, led me to the word of God, and influenced me to seek his teaching by prayer, he was faithful to his own promises, and it was an example of his own words, "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth." My evident sincerity in seeking the truth was sufficient to convince any person, conversant and experienced in the things of God, that, as my friend foretold, thither would all my inquiries lead me; in that would they all finally centre. And could I be assured, beloved reader, whoever thou art, that thou wast as sincerely desirous to know the truth as I then was, and as heartily resolved to embrace it wherever thou mightest find it, and whatever it should cost thee; had I also assurance that, in a believing dependence on these promises, thou wast diligently, and from day to day, in the study of the word of God in prayer, seeking the accomplishment of them; I would as confidently foretel, that, as to those things which I now regard as essential to salvation, and, if thou hast the souls of others committed to thee, as to what is needful for thy usefulness in the ministry, thou wouldst be brought in time to these same conclusions, whatever thy present religious sentiments may be. May the Lord give thee true sincerity, and incline thine heart to try the experiment!

I am aware that many will object to what I have argued on this head, as being too confident; and as what is urged by men of contrary religious sentiments, each in behalf of his own system: and, as I could not leave any material and plausible objection in force against what I have advanced, I hope the reader will excuse my obviating this beforehand. I would therefore entreat those who object to the confidence with which this argument is brought forward, *impartially and carefully to consider the limitations with which on every hand it is guarded:* and then to inquire, whether in any other way, than that which hath been mentioned, they can account for the fact. That is, supposing this Narrative true, (for which the appeal is to the heart-searching God,) and supposing the promises mentioned to be proposed to us, that we may embrace them, depend on them, and plead them in prayer, considering the glory of the divine veracity as concerned in their accomplishment to every believer; let them try whether they can possibly evade one of these conclusions:—either God had failed of his promise;—or he hath, in the main, and as far as is expressed, led the author by his Holy Spirit to the knowledge and belief of the truth.—As to the confidence of men of opposite

Digitized by Google

sentiments, I observe, that many who speak in high terms concerning sincerity and candour, will, without hesitation condemn, as enthusiastical, such reliance on the promises, and this way of searching for truth; and it is plain they do not seek truth in that manner which they condemn in others. Many others perhaps slightly mention these matters, but they will not endure to be closely questioned: for, being conscious that they have not sought the truth in this manner, they evade such discourse as personal. Again, the writings of many professed inquirers after truth evidently show that they expect to find it, not by "trusting in the Lord with all their heart," or seeking it from the Scriptures, and by earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit; but by "leaning to their own understanding;" resting the argument on philosophical reasonings, and the authority of this or that renowned name; and supporting their conclusions by bold and perplexing criticisms and interpretations of Scripture. Hence so many daring appeals from revelation to reason and philosophy! hence such and so many objections, brought against doctrines plainly revealed in God's word, if language hath any determinate meaning! and so many consequences charged upon these doctrines, with a design to invalidate their divine authority; as if the appearance of unreasonableness, imposed by every disingenuous art, were sufficient to prove the plainest revelation of God's Holy Spirit a falsehood! Hence such liberty in interpretation and criticism on the word of God, as the learned would never endure in interpreting or criticising *Virgil* or *Horace!* These things prove that such persons are strangers to that earnest, hearty, sincere desire to *know the truth*, which brings the inquirer to an humble willingness to be taught of God, and, in submission of understanding, to seek wisdom from his word and Spirit. It is indeed most evident, that many who profess to be influenced by *this sincere desire to know the truth*, are not troubled with suspicions that they are, or can be wrong. They have made up their minds before they begin the inquiry; and you will not find them willing to make the least concession, but, in the management of the controversy, resolved to vindicate and contend for every tittle; and where arguments fail, to make use of the other arts of controversy, with which skill in the management of their weapons, and anger against their opponents, can supply them. Where a cause is thus maintained, you may easily know that there is none of that earnest desire of learning the truth, that anxious fear of mistaking it, that self-diffidence, and those doubts concerning the sentiments held at present, which constitute the godly sincerity that leads the inquirer to the word and Spirit of God for direction and teaching. These things taken together, will, on Scriptural grounds, cut off many confident pretenders to sincerity from their claims, as entirely, as they exclude Annas and Caiaphas, and the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees, from being sincere inquirers into the truth of the Old Testament; when in support of their authority and reputation, and influenced by pride and anger, they, under colour of their law, put to death Him "of whom Moses and the prophets did write, even Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God." And as to men of another spirit, who appear sincere, humble, and willing to be taught of God in their inquiry after truth, but do not entirely agree with what has been laid down, I would only wish them to observe the distinction established between some and others of these doctrines. Such persons do not, I dare say, materially differ from that which has been mentioned *as necessary to salvation*: as, therefore, I allow them to have been in the main taught of God, so I only require the same allowance. Let it be supposed that the same God, who, according to his promise, hath led both, as far as is needful to salvation, in the same way, has in other things left us to differ, for the mutual exercise of candour and forbearance, till that time when we shall know even as we are known.

II. I would observe, that this change in my sentiments took place very gradually.

When any person suddenly changes his religious opinions for others very

Digitized by Google

different from them, it is no inconsiderable evidence of a changeable and fickle disposition. It gives cause to suspect that he was not well established in his former sentiments; and that he had taken them upon trust, and was a stranger to the arguments by which they might be defended, and to the objections which might be urged against them. If worldly interest, reputation, or conveniency seem to favour the change, there is room for a presumption, that these had an undue influence upon him: if not, it may be insinuated that he was deluded with specious appearances; that he did not allow himself time to weigh the arguments on each side; and that he had only changed one set of notions for another, without having duly considered either of them. Such objections may reasonably be made, and the consequences of precipitate changes too often justify them. But though I was always, and still am, of an headlong impetuous spirit in other things, and when once I have purposed, can have no rest from incessant agitation of mind, till I have accomplished my design; yet in this particular I acted in direct opposition to my natural temper. Indeed at first I did in some instances too much betray my impetuosity: but at that time I acted not in the character of an inquirer, but in full confidence that I was pleading the cause of truth, and had no more thought of becoming what the world call a *Methodist*, than of turning *Mahometan*. But after that first hurry was over, though commonly in earnest, and sometimes in considerable perturbation of mind, I was outwardly calm and satisfied; being generally enabled to believe that, if I were in any thing at present mistaken, I should sometime be guided to the truth. My determination to set about this inquiry proceeded not so much from anxious fears about my own soul, as from a deep sense impressed upon my heart of the importance of my ministry, the worth of the souls committed to my charge, and the awful account to be given of them; and as I all along bestowed some pains in instructing my people in what I believed to be the truth, I was preserved from any discomposing fears or undue disquietude of mind. I sat down very coolly to search for the truth; I proceeded very gradually, and with *extreme caution;* I took no one opinion upon trust; I gave up none of my sentiments, until the arguments by which I learned to defend them were satisfactorily answered; nor did I admit any new articles into my creed, till either every objection was obviated, or I was pressed on the other hand with such as were still more unanswerable. Much, very much prayer and meditation preceded every change of sentiment; and I was nearly three years, from the beginning of my inquiry, before I came to a determination what was truth. So long, deliberately, and step by step, I examined the premises, before I finally proceeded to draw my conclusion. I perceive much cause to be ashamed of my unteachable temper: for with such opportunities as were afforded me, if I had improved them, I might have attained to the knowledge and belief of the same truths in much less time. But the Lord, I trust, led me in this way, and left me thus far to my own natural pride of heart; that it might more evidently appear that I received not my doctrines from man, but that indeed, in the first instance, I learned them from the word and Spirit of God.

III. I would observe, that I changed my religious views without any teaching from the persons to whose sentiments I have now acceded. For a considerable time after the commencement of my inquiries, I would not so much as read what they had to urge in their own behalf. I entered indeed into a correspondence with Mr N.; my intention, however, was not to learn from him, but to dispute with him; and when he waved controversy, I dropt the correspondence, and utterly neglected his letters. From that time I avoided his company, and all the while I declined hearing him preach. I would not be understood to insinuate, that Mr N. has not been useful to me: he has been, and continues to be, eminently so; and I continually see great cause to bless God for giving me such a friend, to be so near at hand on all occasions. But this I assuredly believe, that had I never seen him,

Digitized by Google

at least from the time that his example had put me upon considering my conduct, I should have arrived at the same views of evangelical truth which I now have. His usefulness to me has all along been in those matters in which we were in some measure agreed, not in those in which we differed; for as to these, my proud heart scorned to have him for a teacher.

At the same time, though I had the offer of several books written by *Dissenters* and *Methodists*, I declined it; and did not, for nearly two years, peruse any of them with sufficient attention to recollect any thing of consequence which they contained. I say not this as slighting these books; for justice requires me to acknowledge, that many, which then I ignorantly despised, contain as solid, judicious, and excellent divinity, as hath been penned since the days of the apostles. But I did not get *my system* from them; for that was nearly complete before I was prevailed upon to read them. My studies, besides the Bible, were chiefly confined to authors of allowed reputation in the church of *England*, several of which I have mentioned. When they differed from each other, (as certainly *Tillotson* and *Hooker*, *Jortin* and *Beveridge*, *Bull* and *Hall* do differ very much indeed,) I endeavoured to judge for myself, comparing all of them with the word of God, and with the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the Church of *England*; and from such authors thus compared, as far as the writings of uninspired men have been instrumental to this change, I have received the greatest part of my present opinions.

But let it be observed, that the further these streams are traced upward towards the fountain of the blessed reformation, the purer they flow, according to my present judgment: and it may easily and undeniably be proved, that there is nothing material preached by many regular clergymen of the establishment, under the scandal of *Methodistical*, which was not expressly taught by those excellent persons, who, having laid the foundation of our church, gave their bodies to be burned in confirmation of their doctrine. It is greatly to be wished, that their lives and discourses, living and dying, and their remaining writings, were more generally known among us, and did not remain locked up from the world in large folios in the learned languages, and in books out of print, or exceedingly scarce. In consequence of this, the members of our national church are in general utterly ignorant of its standard-doctrines, and ignorantly brand those as *Methodists* and *Enthusiasts*, who preach zealously the very doctrines of the first Reformers.

IV. I would observe the great influence which the study of the Scriptures had in producing this change.

We are all too apt, without careful examination, to take things for granted, especially in respect of religion. We often collect our scheme of divinity from other authors, or from our own reasonings and imaginations; and only seek for a few detached texts which appear to countenance our preconceived opinions; neglecting, or very slightly considering such parts of the word of God as seem incapable of being made use of to our purpose. We are likewise too prone, in availing ourselves of the labours of critics and expositors, to resign up ourselves implicitly to their guidance, and to imagine that we have proof enough of our doctrines, if we can produce the sanction of some great name that has espoused and maintained them, without carefully examining whether they be right or wrong: but this is to pay that deference to the human interpretation, which is only due to the divine book commented on. We, ministers especially, though at ordination we solemnly promise to turn all our studies, as much as may be, into this channel, are very apt to suffer our time and thoughts to be engrossed with such studies and employments, as are foreign to our profession, and interfere with it, and which leave at most but a secondary attention for the study of the word of God. And who can deny, that many do not bestow so much pains in meditating upon the Bible, and in comparing spiritual things with spiritual; or one part of Scripture with another, and every part with what they experience in their own hearts, and what they hear and see in the world around them, as they

Digitized by Google

do about matters of far less consequence? So that probably, should they at any time sit down to diligent examination of the whole word of God, they would find it a very different book than they expected. Thus at least it has been with me, and possibly it may be so with many others.

The word of God informs us that true wisdom, the saving, practical, and experimental knowledge of divine things, is not to be acquired without earnest and diligent seeking: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Prov. ii. 1—6. If then our wisdom has been acquired without any of that eagerness and painful diligence with which the covetous man desires and seeks for his riches, it is a shrewd conjecture, that it is not of the genuine sort. Once I had in my own esteem a sort of wisdom, which seemed to offer itself to me spontaneously, and to be found with little seeking. But now I am persuaded it was a mere counterfeit, a fair-seeming pernicious foolishness.

That which I now esteem to be true wisdom, if I could but attain to it, is not to be acquired in so easy a manner. When I first began to desire and seek this wisdom, I set out with the assurance that it was to be found in the Holy Scriptures, and no where else; they alone being able to make us wise unto salvation. I therefore consider myself engaged to make them my study: and as the whole was "given by inspiration from God," and was all declared to be profitable, according to the various ends which the Holy Spirit designed in it, I made the whole my study. Thus I learned to look upon the Bible as my book of instructions, given me along with the ministerial office by my Lord and Master; that from thence I might deduce all my doctrines, instructions, and admonitions, warnings, examples, encouragements, rules of duty, and motives to duty: and I also considered it to be the believer's charter of privileges, containing exceedingly great and precious promises, and the whole of that which God saw fit to reveal concerning those unspeakable and inconceivable good things which he hath of his infinite mercy prepared for them that love him. In order therefore faithfully to declare my message from the Lord Almighty to the souls of men, I found it indispensably needful to be well acquainted with every part, and to take the word of God myself, as well as propose it to others, as "the lantern of my feet, and the light of my paths:" not only attending to the *letter*, but also to the *true meaning*, the mind of the Spirit of God in it. This I found to be a work that required much time, great diligence, mature consideration, and an unbiassed, unprejudiced mind.

With this view of the matter partly obtained, and continually more and more unfolding itself, I studied the word of God; and having now for nearly four years thus employed a very considerable part of my time, neither rejecting, nor yet greatly depending on the assistance of interpreters. I sincerely desired to know the truth, and for that end I read the Scriptures, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God." And though there have been seasons of remissness, when other employments and studies too much interfered with this main business; and though at first I was very far from an unbiassed mind, being blindly and obstinately prejudiced against those doctrines which I now believe to be the true gospel of Jesus Christ; yet in that space, I have read the Bible many times over, in every part with the strictest attention of which I have been capable. There are very few passages which relate to doctrine, that I have not repeatedly and diligently examined, comparing one with another, with all the care and consideration I could; and I seldom ever ceased meditating on any portion of Scripture, until I had attained to some satisfying conclusion concerning its true meaning, and its agreement with other Scriptures. I may truly say, I have filled *reams of paper* with religious discussions, with sermons, expositions and let-

Digitized by Google

ters; in all which I ransacked the Bible to bring as much Scriptural evidence for my direction as possible. For these last two years I have scarcely opened a book except upon religious subjects, and from morning till night, nearly every day, all this while, my thoughts incessantly have been employed in meditation upon the great truths of the gospel. Every difficulty and objection, (and difficulties and objections, both from my own meditations and in the course of my reading, continually crowded upon my mind,) sent me to the word of God, and increased my care and attention in examining and weighing every text of Scripture, respecting the point in question, before I exchanged my old opinion for a new one.

Thus, I may truly say, I have sought in the word of God, (that field in which alone this precious treasure lies hid,) "for wisdom," *for the saving knowledge of divine things*, "as for silver, and searched for her as for hid treasure." And though I am sensible that my knowledge is still comparatively superficial, the knowledge of a child, of a novice in the school of Christ; yet, I trust that, as far as relates to the leading truths of the gospel, according to the promise, I am brought "to understand the fear of the Lord, and have found the knowledge of God."

Permit me now, beloved reader, to put thee in remembrance, that until thou hast, with some good measure of this diligence, studied the whole word of God, thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon men and doctrines. Be cautious what thou doest; let these men quite alone, until thou hast imitated the conduct of the noble *Bereans*, and thoroughly, and with unbiassed mind, examined and meditated upon the whole word of God, to see whether the things they believe and teach be so or not: lest otherwise it should come to pass, (as probably it will,) that, in opposing and condemning them, thou shouldst be found to fight against God. Oh! that the Lord would hear and grant my request, and by his Holy Spirit powerfully incline the hearts of all who read these sheets, according to their leisure, station in life, obligations and opportunities, thus attentively to read their Bibles; not as the word of man, but as the word of God himself, speaking from heaven unto them, and concerning the everlasting interests of their precious and immortal souls! Be the adviser what he will, despised and deserving to be despised, the advice is undoubtedly good:—advice he will have no occasion to repent having thus given, at the solemn hour of death, and the awful day of judgment; advice which, at those approaching seasons, none will repent having followed, though it should divert them from more amusing, and at this day, more reputable studies; or engross that time which they have been accustomed to devote to more pleasurable and fashionable employments; but which, neglected, will be an additional sting in every conscience through all the countless ages of eternity.

And, Oh! that they to whom the chief Shepherd hath committed the care of precious souls, and at whose hands he will assuredly require every one that perishes through their default, would take in good part this expression of the very affectionate desire of my soul, both in behalf of them and of their flocks, in dropping these hints concerning their peculiar obligations, to devote much of their time to the attentive unbiassed study of the word of God, that infinitely best, but often least studied, of all books! What avails it, that the ministers of the everlasting gospel should be learned classical scholars, profound philosophers, metaphysicians and mathematicians, expert logicians, or adorned with the knowledge of the politer sciences, if they are unacquainted, or but superficially acquainted, with the sacred Scriptures? These other branches of literature may amuse and entertain them, may procure them preferment, reputation, respect and favour; but the knowledge of the Bible alone can enable them, in such a manner, to "take heed to themselves, and to their doctrine," as shall issue in the everlasting salvation of their own souls, and the souls committed to their care. Far be it from me to presume to lay down my opinions as the standard of doctrine, or a rule for the faith and preaching of my brethren in the sacred ministry! but

Digitized by Google

the more obscure I am, the less objection can there reasonably be against my hinting to them, that if any one should find this subject manifest itself to his conscience, and make him sensible, that verily he hath been faulty in attending to other employments, and studying other books more than the word of God; then, possibly, he may be mistaken in his sentiments concerning the doctrines of the gosepl, and, being mistaken himself, may be misleading others, to the endangering of their immortal souls: for he cannot be certain but that, should he employ some years in this single study, (which its importance well deserves,) he may find the Bible a very different book than he expected.

V. I would observe the influence which *prayer* appears to have had in effecting this change.

I am aware that the world, though called *Christian*, is come to such a pass, that the very mention of this subject in many companies is accounted ill manners, or even received with ridicule; and that being known to maintain a constant communion with God, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, is alone sufficient to denominate any person a *Methodist*. It is however most certain, that the word of God is full of precepts, instructions, exhortations, invitations, promises and examples to this effect. He never read his Bible who knows not this; nor can any man, under any pretence whatever, make a jest of this great duty and privilege of a believer, without pouring contempt upon the Holy Scriptures, and insulting the brightest characters there proposed to us as examples, not excepting the Lord Jesus himself. Let men, therefore, under the profession of *Christianity*, be as irreligious and profane as they please, I shall not be ashamed to speak upon so unfashionable a topic: for if the word of God be true, he never knew any thing as he ought to know, never believed, never repented, never performed one duty aright in his life, who hath not sought all his wisdom, knowledge, faith, repentance, and sufficiency for obedience, from God, by fervent, instant, persevering prayer. Time was, even since I had souls committed to my care, that I lived in the neglect of this duty, and so "without God in the world;" but since, through his forbearance and mercy, I have been in earnest about the salvation of my own soul, and the souls of other men; my conduct in this respect has been very different.

"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." As he is the Spirit of truth, it is his office to lead us into all truth, and to teach us all things: for he searches and reveals the deep things of God. It is expressly promised to the true church, that "all her children shall be taught of the Lord," (Isaiah liv. 13.) Referring to this, Christ hath declared that "none can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father," and "taught of God," (John vi. 44, 45.) And St Paul declares, that "The *natural man* receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) The *natural man* [ψυχικος] is explained in Jude, by *not having the Spirit*; which is evidently the Apostle's meaning in this passage; for in the preceding verse he declares that he preached the gospel, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." On these grounds I concluded that man's natural understanding could not, spiritually or profitably, receive the knowledge of revealed mysteries, unless it were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I learned also, that our eyes may be blinded by Satan, the god and prince of this world; that our understandings may be closed, and a veil be upon our hearts, when we read the word of God; in which case the letter of the Scriptures, without the Spirit, only killeth. Hence the need of the "understanding being opened, to understand the Scriptures;" for want of which the plainest discourses of our Lord to his disciples,

Digitized by Google

concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were hidden from them, and they understood them not.—The veil also must be taken from the heart: for want of which the *Jews*, in reading the *Old Testament*, cannot understand the plainest declarations of *Moses* and the prophets, concerning their promised Saviour.

The Scriptures also every where declare, that true wisdom is the gift of God, and must be asked of him, by every one who would be wise unto salvation; that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;" and that those "who receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved, are given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie; that they might all be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. ii. 10—12.)

On these grounds, and depending upon the promises and invitations so plentifully interspersed throughout the Scriptures; when I began to inquire after the truth, I was led also in some measure to cry unto the Lord for his guidance and teaching; and, as my mind grew more engaged, and my difficulties, in extricating myself from the labyrinths of controversy, increased, I became more and more earnest, constant, and particular, in making my requests known unto God. My constant prayer to the Lord was, to be delivered from pride and prejudice, blindness of heart, contempt of the truth, obstinacy, enthusiasm, ignorance, and error; and that the Lord would give me wisdom and knowledge, guide me to the truth as it is in Jesus, open my understanding, take away the veil from my heart, and make known unto me the way of salvation which is revealed to sinners in his holy word. Thus, waiting upon the Lord according to his own appointment, depending on him and pleading his promises from day to day, I was led from one thing to another, until my view of religious truth was totally changed. This I most firmly believe to have been by the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth, powerfully enlightening my mind, opening the Scriptures, and, by dispelling the clouds of error and prejudice, enabling me to receive the truth in faith and love. I am conscious that I have no intention, in speaking thus publicly on such a subject, but to advance the glory of God in the salvation of souls. But, as in his presence, I must declare that I have prayed over many of the most interesting passages of Scripture, chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse, with the most anxious dread of rejecting or mistaking the truth, or embracing a falsehood; and with the most earnest desire of knowing what that doctrine was which Jesus and his apostles taught.—In the sight of God, I am sensible I have abundant cause to be humbled and ashamed of my frequent remissness, and the continual defilements of my prayers; but, as surely as I believe his promises to be faithful, as surely as I believe him to be a God that heareth prayer; so surely do I believe, that "flesh and blood hath not revealed" to me the doctrines I now preach, but God himself by his Holy Spirit.

Reader, whoever thou art, if thy conscience testifies that thou hast hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty, or the formal, lifeless, unmeaning performance of it with thy lips, while thy heart hath been disengaged, and thy thoughts allowedly wandering to the ends of the earth: if thou hast not been accustomed by fervent prayer to seek wisdom from God by his teaching Spirit: if thou knowest not what it is to exercise faith upon the promises pointed out to thee, nor to plead them in prayer to a promise-keeping God: if all thy knowledge of divine things hath been acquired by leaning to thy own understanding: if in reading the Scriptures thou hast looked more to learned critics, commentators, and expositors, than to the illuminating Spirit of God: then be as sure as the word of God is true, and as we are concerned in it, that "the light which is in thee is darkness," and that thou "knowest nothing yet as thou oughtest to know."—May the Lord effectually incline thine heart to take a contrary course, and to seek wisdom where alone it can be found, even from the Lord, "the Father of lights, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift," who hath invited and commanded thee to ask, that it may be given thee!

Digitized by Google

VI. I would observe, that there is nothing in this Narrative which can *reasonably* be condemned as *enthusiasm*.

It is allowed that *enthusiasm* properly so called, is a frequent attendant on religious zeal: that in some of its operations it is a grievous evil, and in all attended with many inconveniences; and that it ought very carefully to be guarded against by every religious professor and zealous preacher. It would also be in vain to pretend that the late revivals of religion, which have been indiscriminately stigmatized with the name of *Methodism*, have been, in opinion and practice, entirely free from this enthusiasm. For what revivals of religion ever were free from scandals? Where the Lord sows his good seed, there the enemy will be sure to scatter his tares. It must be confessed, that some of the most eminent instruments in this work, whose names, when prejudice shall vanish, will be handed down with honour, as burning and shining lights, to the latest periods of the church, have, by the greatness of their zeal, through human frailty, been betrayed into sentiments, expressions, and deportment, in some instances, justly to be censured as enthusiastical; of which their enemies have not failed sufficiently to avail themselves.—But whatever indiscretions and mistakes particular persons, who have preached these doctrines, may have fallen into; this doth not, in the judgment of candid and impartial persons, in the least affect the general cause, or prove the doctrines erroneous. We would not contend for the credit of individuals, or the interests of a party, but for the doctrines of God's word, and of the established Church of *England*. These will continue true and important, though many of those who have zealously and successfully preached them, may have justly incurred the charge of enthusiasm: and I would confidently insist on it, that a man may be led to the belief of the doctrines, in the way of sober rational inquiry, and zealously preach them, without being an enthusiast.

It would be very well, if some of those who so readily accuse whole bodies of apparently religious persons of *enthusiasm*, would favour us with their determinate definition of an *enthusiast*. In its original meaning, the word has a very favourable sense, and implies, that, by a *divine* influence upon the soul, a man is filled with an ardour and warmth of zeal in the cause in which he is engaged. Now, "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" and if our ardour of soul be from the Spirit of God, according to the revealed will of God, and for the glory of God, it is the noblest, most desirable, most heavenly, and most beneficial exertion of the human mind. In every thing but religion, an ardour, described by the term *enthusiasm*, is allowed and commended: a *poetical*, a *military*, a *patriotic enthusiasm*, even when they carry men beyond the strict bounds of cold reasonings and exact prudence, fail not to meet with admirers. Our zeal may be fervent in every thing without censure, unless we be zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of immortal souls. But there is an *enthusiasm* of this sort, which forms the highest elevation, and the noblest effort of the human mind. Such an enthusiasm animated the apostle *Paul* in all his self-denying labours and sufferings, and filled his writings (under the guidance of the Holy Ghost,) with the most ardent zeal for the honour of his dear Saviour, and affection for the souls of men. Such an enthusiasm he expresses, when he says, (2 Cor. v. 13, 14.) "Whether we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; for the love of Christ constraineth us." Of this enthusiasm I wish I were far more *guilty*. But on the other hand, there is danger of a counterfeit, pernicious enthusiasm; and about that we are at present inquiring. Now, I apprehend, that in order to constitute this culpable enthusiasm, some one or more of the following things must appear. Either, *the ardour of soul excited proceeds from a heated imagination, or from a delusion of Satan, instead of being produced by a divine influence;* or, *the cause in which this ardour is employed is the cause of error and wickedness, instead of the cause of God and truth;* or, *it exerts itself in unjustifiable measures and practices.* For if our ardour be *warranted by the word of God*, if it *do not tend to the dishonour of God, and* if *it be confined in its exercise to the rules and precepts of the*

Digitized by Google

word of God:—how intense soever it may be, I can see no cause to censure it; unless men can be too zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls.

But whatever be the distinguishing criterion of enthusiasm, I suppose it will be difficult to fix a charge of it upon any thing for which I plead in this Narrative. I never was taught any thing by impulses, impressions, visions, dreams or revelations, except so far as the work of the Spirit, in enlightening the understanding for the reception of the truths contained in the Holy Scriptures, is sometimes styled revelation. Other revelation I never expected. Not but that the Lord is sovereign, and may do what he will with his own; and, if he pleases, may, and I suppose sometimes does, go out of the ordinary course, for the conversion of a sinner, or the guidance of a perplexed, or the comfort of a distressed soul; but I never took one step in dependence on any such extraordinary interpositions, nor ever encouraged any person to do so. And surely it will not be called *enthusiasm*, by any but avowed infidels, to believe God's word to be the standard of truth, and his promises to be faithful; and in this belief to seek for the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, in the manner above related. In this way I have been taught no new truths; but, as I believe, have been shown the meaning, use, tendency, consistency, harmony, wisdom, and glory of those truths which are contained in the sacred volume; but which before, through pride and ignorance, I perverted, neglected, reviled, or counted foolishness. Nor do I make any pretences to infallibility: God hath not, I trust, left me so unstable, as to float about in the uncertain stream of opinion, and to be "tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." As to the grand doctrines of the gospel which I have marked out as *necessary to salvation*, they are neither so uncertain nor so difficult as men would persuade us: their uncertainty and difficulty arise wholly from our pride, prejudice, love of sin, and inattentive ignorance of our own hearts. There is really much difficulty in bringing vain man to cease from leaning to his own understanding, and in prevailing with him to trust in the Lord with all his heart, and to be willing, in the humble posture of a little child, to be taught of God. Nothing but a deep conviction of guilt, a fear of wrath, and a sense of our lost condition by nature and practice, can bring our minds into this submissive frame: but, this being effected, the difficulty is over, and the way of salvation is so plain, that the "way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." As to the other doctrines which I myself believe, though they seem plain enough to me, I desire not to proselyte others to them, but am willing to leave them as matters in which fallible men may differ without danger. And as to my sufficiency for the faithful discharge of my ministry, to God's glory and the salvation of souls, he will not, I trust, deceive my expectations, which are grounded on his promises. For the rest, I mistake daily, and find myself in continual danger of mixing my own imaginations with his divine truth, and of following my own spirit instead of his. Whatever I preach truly, or do wisely, to God be the glory; for I am not sufficient of myself to think a good thought: whatever I speak falsely, or do foolishly, to me be the shame; for it is the natural fruit of my own deceitful heart. If this be enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm warranted, not only by the word of God, as I have endeavoured to prove, but by the whole liturgy of our Church. We all at ordination profess to be "moved by the Holy Ghost," to take the ministerial office upon us; and assuredly we cannot be moved by the Holy Ghost, if we neither have the Holy Ghost, nor may expect his help and guidance. We agree to pray that the Lord would "lead into the way of truth, all such as have erred and are deceived;" that he would "illuminate all bishops, priests, and deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his holy word;" that he would "cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;" that "he would grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit;" with much more to this effect: and I am persuaded, that such a confidence as I have expressed cannot be censured as enthusiasm, without including our Church-establishment and continual public worship in the same charge.

Digitized by Google

VII. *Lastly*, I would observe that our opposers and despisers will seldom give us the hearing. With all their pretensions to candour, reasoning, and free inquiry, they accuse and condemn us without so much as knowing, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what our sentiments are, although furnished with such plentiful means of information, in those numerous publications which are now extant upon these subjects.

Having imbibed strong prejudices against us, they frame so contemptible an opinion of our understandings and writings, that they will not bestow so much pains, or afford so much regard, as to peruse our books; and to call an author a *Methodist*, is with many people a sufficient reason why they should not read his works. Hence it comes to pass, that, for want of information, our doctrines are grievously misrepresented; and, in general, the attacks made upon us, though calculated to make our persons odious and despised, do not in the least affect the argument in debate. Our adversaries in general know little of our opinions, except what they have picked up by *hearsay*, in which neither the connection, consistency, tendency, nor application of those opinions is preserved, no wonder therefore that we are vilified and reproached with things to which we are utter strangers, or which we abominate and protest against every Lord's day, and against which we neglect not to fill our writings with reasonings, warnings, and cautions.

For my own part, I freely acknowledge, that my strongest objections against this scheme of doctrine arose wholly from *misapprehension and mistake*. Not having read their books, my notions of the doctrines of the *Methodists* were received from vulgar report, and from their enemies; while my creative imagination put its own construction on them, and drew terrible consequences from them: so that when I preached against them, I was as one fighting with my own shadow; and in speaking evil of those things that I knew not, I only betrayed my own ignorance and pride. No better founded are the lamentable outcries which at this day are made against our principles, as if they tended to banish reason, argument, sober-mindedness, and morality out of the world, and in their stead to substitute a set of whimsical vagaries, which are without foundation in reason or Scripture, and have no influence, or rather a pernicious influence, on our conduct and conversation. When such a declamation is ended, (for one would not interrupt it) ask the declaimer what a *Methodist* is? he can scarcely give you an answer: inquire about the doctrines of the Methodists,—he does not understand them;—or their writings,—he has never read them!

Reader, if thou desirest to know what our opinions are, and what foundation there is for these heavy charges, read our books; but read them with attention, and aim at impartiality; compare them with the word of God, and with the liturgy, articles, and homilies of the Church of *England*: and, if thou hast leisure and opportunity, with the works of our first reformers. Nor do we desire thee to renounce thy *reason*, but only to make this *reasonable* concession; that where thy reason is ready to determine one way, but God hath expressly determined another way, thou wouldst allow him to understand his own mysteries better than thou dost: and that therefore thou oughtest, by faith exercised upon the veracity of God, to receive, *implicitly and without reasoning*, those doctrines which God hath expressly revealed, and which thy reason feels to be far above its reach, and therefore doubtless out of its province. Whenever, on such inquiry, thou discoverest us to be mistaken, there dissent from us, yea, blame us, as far as meekness and candour will permit: but do not condemn us in the gross; do not assert our scheme of doctrine to be enthusiastical and groundless, though some of our writers should be found to have advanced questionable opinions. This were the way to drive all truth and certainty out of the world; for what book can be mentioned, the Bible excepted, in which there is nothing advanced either erroneous or questionable?

And be assured, that to read only one side of the question, and then clamorously to adopt every childish cavil, every vague report, every scandalous falsehood, and industriously to propagate them, as if these afforded a suffi-

Digitized by Google

cient confutation of all the arguments, authorities, and scriptural testimonies, with which we support our sentiments; is no evidence of a candid liberal mind, or of a sincere desire to know the truth. And let it be observed, that though some professors have been proved enthusiasts, and others detected to be hypocrites, this doth not prove that we are all enthusiasts and hypocrites. Such rash judgments are most hurtful to those who pass them.

For myself, I here publicly profess, that I will, to the end of my days, acknowledge it as the greatest obligation that any person can confer on me, if, in the spirit of meekness, he will point out to me any error or enthusiastical delusion into which I have fallen, and by sufficient arguments convince me of it, I trust, that my earnest desire to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus," has not abated in its influence, and that I still retain the same disinterested resolution to embrace it and adhere to it, with which I set out. Still am I solicitously fearful of being betrayed by a warmth of spirit, and by the deceitfulness of my heart, into erroneous opinions. But clamour and reproach, objections and arguments, brought against sentiments I detest, or consequences I cannot see to be fairly deducible from our doctrines; or such reasonings as set one divine attribute at variance with another, make one part of the Bible contradict another, or exalt the human understanding upon the tribunal, and arraign and condemn revealed mysteries at her presumptuous bar;—will have no weight at all with me, or with any who ever knew the grace of God in truth.

And now, beloved reader, let me conclude with leaving it upon thy conscience to search for the truth of the gospel in the study of God's word, accompanied by prayer, as thou would search for hid treasure. I give thee this counsel, expecting to meet thee at the day of judgment, that our meeting may be with joy, and not with grief: may the Lord incline thee to follow it with that solemn season full in view! Time how short! eternity how long! life how precarious and vanishing! death how certain! the pursuits and employments of this present life how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious! God's favour and eternal life how unspeakably precious! His wrath, the never-quenched fire, the never-dying worm, how dreadful! Oh! trifle not away the span of life, in heaping up riches which shortly must be left for ever, and which profit not in the day of wrath; in such pleasures and amusements as will issue in eternal torments, or in seeking that glory which shall be swallowed up in everlasting infamy. Agree with me but in this,—that it is good to redeem precious time, to labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, and to attend principally to the one thing needful; take but thy measure *of truth* as well as *duty* from the word of God; be willing to be taught of God; meditate on his word day and night; let it be "the light of thy feet, and the lantern of thy paths;" and in studying it, "lean not to thy own understanding," trust not implicitly to expositors and commentators, but ask wisdom and teaching of God. Be not a *Felix*, saying to thy serious apprehensions about thy soul, "Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee;" lest death and judgment come before that season:—and be not an *Agrippa*, almost persuaded to be a *Christian;* but seek to be altogether such as the primitive *Christians* were. I say, agree but with me in these reasonable requests, and we shall at length agree in all things;—in many, in this world;—in all, when we hear the Son of God address us in these rejoicing words,—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." May the Lord vouchsafe unto the writer, and to every reader of this Narrative, "that wisdom which is from above;" that teaching of his Holy Spirit, which guides into the ways of peace; that faith which justifies and works by love; that peace of God which passeth understanding; and that measure of sanctifying and strengthening grace, which may enable each of us to be "steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, as knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Digitized by Google

DISCOURSE

UPON

REPENTANCE.

And they went forth, and preached that men should repent.—Mark vi. 12.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

THE importance of the subject treated of, and the rank which it holds in the word of God, among the doctrines and duties of Christianity; the backwardness of mankind to attend to it, in proportion to that importance; and an apprehension that it is not insisted on, either from the pulpit or the press, so frequently and strenuously in our times, as it was in the days of the apostles; form, collectively, the reasons which induced me to this publication. Much ignorance, and various hurtful and perplexing mistakes and difficulties, about repentance, may be observed, both amongst professors of serious godliness and others; I therefore thought, that it might not be unseasonable or unprofitable, to publish a discourse upon the subject.

My first intention was only to send to the press the substance of a sermon which I had repeatedly preached; but the same reasons influenced me, upon mature consideration, to complete the design, as far as I was capable; though the size and price are both by that means increased.

Some passages may be judged to bear hard upon certain popular sentiments, and current species of religion. I have indeed very plainly spoken my mind respecting several things, which I am convinced are detrimental to the cause of pure religion; and I hope I have not transgressed the rules of meekness and candour. Even wise and good men, in their zeal for one part of divine truth, may drop unguarded expressions, which *bear an interpretation* injurious to another part of equal importance; and thus, undesignedly, by their reputation give sanction to error. This our artful and watchful enemy will be sure to observe, and make his advantage of, in opposing true religion; by which some may be deceived, others hardened, and religion itself exposed to contempt and reproach.

It behoves then other friends of religion, who are witnesses of such perversions, to oppose and obviate them; nor must the reputation of some, or the censure of others, among their fellow-servants, be regarded, when the glory of God, the interests of religion, and the salvation of souls are at stake. Were some pious men, now in glory, to return on earth, and witness the abuse that has been made of certain indiscreet expressions which they employed, they would be the first to approve every endeavour to counteract their fatal tendency. With all plainness and freedom I would plead the cause of truth and holiness; but would give no *needless* offence to any man. May that God, whom I would "serve with my spirit, in the gospel of his Son," powerfully succeed this feeble attempt to promote his glory in the salvation of souls.

Olney, 2nd February, 1785.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A

DISCOURSE

ON

REPENTANCE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Christian Religion, as St. Paul preached it both to Jews and Gentiles, consists of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," and may therefore be properly called the religion of a sinner; for none but sinners need repentance, or faith in a Mediator, or that forgiveness of sins, which through him is preached to all that believe.

This consideration ought carefully to be attended to; Jesus Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance:" and if men lose sight of this peculiarity of the gospel, they will mistake in a fundamental concern; and be offended with those ministers, who alone address them in a Scriptural method. Our business, as preachers of the gospel, is not with men, merely as rational agents, but with men as sinners. We must not address them, as if they were newly entered on a state of trial; were as yet free from all blame; and were at last to stand or fall according to their future good or bad behaviour, and only needed to be instructed in their duty, and excited to perform it. This is not the state of the case. Even the most moral, respectable, and amiable of mankind are *sinners*,—condemned sinners. In this light the word of God considers us; and informs us, (not "What good thing we may do to inherit eternal life," but) "What we must do to be saved" from impending ruin; whither a sinner "may flee from the wrath to come." And thus must the faithful minister address his hearers, calling upon them as sinners, to repent and believe the gospel.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men." Rom. v. 12. In consequence of the awful sentence, "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return," millions through successive generations have yielded to the stroke: all the former inhabitants of the earth are swept into the grave by one general execution: many are at this moment experiencing the agonies of death; numbers are bewailing their departed and departing friends and relatives.—We too feel the consequences of sin, in our own personal pains and sickness, which are the forerunners and earnests of our dissolution: we too must have the sentence executed upon us in all its rigour. The wisest cannot elude it, the strongest cannot resist its stroke, nor can the richest purchase exemption from it.

The constant and extensive ravages of death are, in themselves, extremely affecting to the considerate spectator: but become more so when we reflect, that as certainly as when a malefactor is dragged from prison, and executed on a scaffold, he dies for breaking the laws of the land; so certainly, when a sinner dies, he dies for breaking the law of God.

Digitized by Google

Had sin and death been hitherto equally unknown to mankind; and now in our days had sin first made its entrance: immediately upon man's rebellion had we heard the sentence audibly and solemnly denounced, "Dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return;" had fevers, dropsies, palsies, apoplexies, consumptions, and other mortal diseases, on the one hand; with earthquakes, famines, and wars on the other, suddenly begun to spread desolation through families, villages, cities, and kingdoms among the guilty alone: should we behold at once multitudes dead, and multitudes in the agonies of death, the rest mourning over their beloved friends, and trembling for themselves; (like Egypt when there was not a house, in which there was not one dead;) the connection betwixt transgressing the divine law, and being punished with death, might be more affecting, but would not be more certain, than it now is; though it is seldom seriously laid to heart.

Or, were men in general free from sin; but from time to time one and another transgressed; who immediately upon transgressing was punished by death, according to the examples of vindictive justice recorded in the Scriptures: the connection would be more attended to, but not more certain than at present; wher, "because sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily*, the hearts of the sons of men are wholly set in them to do evil." Eccles. viii. 11.

But as all have sinned, and all die, and things have gone on so for many generations, death is considered as a thing of course: we live in the midst of its devastations without horror, or uneasy reflections; and inquire little why it is so? or what the consequence will be? Like soldiers who grow inured to scenes of blood, and insensible to dangers through being familiar with them.

But this, solemn and alarming as it is, forms only a small part of the sentence of condemnation, which we lie under. Our Lord warns us, "not to fear them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." In comparison with this effect of divine wrath, the worst which men can do to us, is not, in the judgment of the Son of God, worthy of our fear. Yet the bare recital of those tortures, which the cruelty of man hath invented and inflicted, in killing the body, is sufficient to chill our very blood: how dreadful therefore must they have been to those who endured them! And what must that misery be, compared with which the other is not worth a fear? Yet to this awful destruction every sinner is condemned, for breaking the law, and rebelling against the authority of his Creator.

Imagine to yourselves a company of condemned criminals in a dungeon. A warrant arrives:—one is taken from them, they see him no more; know not what becomes of him; and do not readily believe any reports which reach them, of the tortures which he endured, and the pains he suffered; another is thus taken from them, and another. The remainder still suppose that their companions are only released from the miseries of a dungeon; and expect their own turn merely as a similar deliverance. All this time, however, certain messengers from the king earnestly persuade them to submit, ask forgiveness, and accept of mercy. A few are prevailed upon, and dismissed; but the rest, seeing no difference betwixt those who are taken from them by a warrant, and those who are set at liberty with a pardon, persist in their obstinacy, and treat all persuasion with neglect and contempt.

This is the exact representation of the condition men are in. Death removes our friends and neighbours, one by one: we see not how they fare in another world; nor are we disposed to believe that "they lift up their eyes in hell, being in torments," (though this is indeed the awful condition of all who die impenitent.) Our turn will shortly come; but we are seldom duly apprehensive about the consequences. "All things happen alike to all; as dieth the sinner, so dieth the righteous:" each is released from the evils of life; faith alone can follow the one to heaven, and the other to hell: but all men have not faith; therefore most treat with neglect and contempt the

Digitized by Google

preachers of the gospel, who inform them of their danger, and in God's name call upon them to repent, believe, and be saved.

But, beloved, though much grieved and discouraged by this neglect, we must not desist, nor would we despair of success. Let me beseech you then to keep in your mind these solemn and important truths, whilst with all seriousness, earnestness, and tender compassion, I address you as condemned sinners, in danger of eternal misery. We must take God's part against you, and vindicate his justice in that awful sentence which he hath denounced; but we can sympathize with you, and weep over you, and "long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ." We also were involved in the same guilt, and under the same condemnation; we were equally secure and obstinate in sin, and equally negligent of salvation. But being now, through God's mercy, made sensible of our guilt and danger; and having upon repentance found forgiveness, and enjoying the hopes and first-fruits of eternal happiness, we are desirous our fellow-sinners should share our deliverance, and experience our felicity.

To be instrumental to the salvation of your souls, my fellow-sinners, is all to which the true minister of Christ aspires. However your minds may be blinded by "the god of this world," we see your danger, and mourn over your delusion. Your fondness for perishing vanities, and disregard to your eternal interests, excite our compassion; and would excite our indignation and astonishment, had not we too been equally sottish. Of the worth of your souls, the danger to which they are exposed, the preciousness of salvation, and the happiness of being truly religious, we are deeply convinced. "We have believed, and therefore speak;" and though in ourselves unworthy and insufficient, yet being entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, "we are now ambassadors for Christ, and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God."

The most high God hath prepared a royal feast; all things are ready, rich abundance of provisions, and plenty of room! We are sent to invite the guests, and are directed to "compel them to come in." We would therefore invite, exhort, expostulate, warn, persuade, and command, with all tenderness and authority, and not take a denial. Blame not, I beseech you, our earnestness; be not disgusted or offended with our importunity; do not "pray us to have you excused;" do not overwhelm us with discouragement, and send us to give, with tears, an account of our ill success. Our love to your immortal souls, our longing after your everlasting happiness, constrain us to be thus troublesome and importunate. Nay, though you frown, insult, threaten, and persecute, we must persist, so long as there is a shadow of a hope. "We must not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." And at last "if ye will not hear, we must weep in secret places for your pride;" after His example, who wept over ungrateful Jerusalem.

To the true believer, careless sinners appear like intoxicated persons in a house which is on fire; who must be consumed in the flames, unless they can be induced to come forth, though themselves are utterly insensible of the danger. You may think yourselves secure, and make yourselves merry with our fears: but your awful infatuation, and imminent danger, are so manifest to us, that we must persist in our endeavours to convince you, so long as you are on this side of everlasting burnings. Thus Noah was treated by the inhabitants of the old world, and Lot even by his sons-in-law, with neglect and contempt when they warned them of their danger; but too late they found their warnings true; and so will you find ours, when death and judgment come, should you now slight them. "Because I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh," saith the Lord himself. Prov. i. 24—26. But I would rise superior to such discouraging apprehensions, and expect better success in this feeble attempt to call sinners to repentance: humbly hoping that God will hear my prayers, and employ this discourse as his instrument in that blessed work.

Digitized by Google

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The blessed Jesus also began to preach, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "And the apostles went forth and preached that men should repent." After the resurrection of Christ, they were commissioned to "preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Accordingly, Peter preached to the Jews, "Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Paul in like manner addressed the Gentiles; "God commandeth all men every where to repent;" and informed them, "that men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

From these, and many other testimonies of the word of God, judge ye, beloved, of the importance and certainty of our subject. No matter of trivial concern which may safely be disregarded, or of doubtful disputation which may plausibly be gainsayed or questioned, now demands our attention. But a subject of equal evidence with the word of "God, who cannot lie," and of importance proportioned to the interests of eternal ages.

Hear me then, I beseech you, with candour and attention; lay aside prejudice and levity, whilst with all seriousness and plainness I discourse concerning, 1. The necessity of repentance. 2. The nature of repentance. 3. The encouragement given to repentance. 4. The proper season for repentance; and, 5. The means to be used in repenting.—For the love of thy soul, I beseech thee, sinner; and as thou wilt answer it at the day of judgement, I charge it upon thy conscience, to lay this matter home to thy heart, as in the sight of God; at the same time beseeching him to make thee partaker "of that repentance, which is unto salvation, not to be repented of."

PART FIRST.

Concerning the Necessity of Repentance.

Before we enter more full upon the subject, I would premise, that I choose the word *Necessity*, as the most comprehensive which occurs to my mind: and I would be understood to intend by "the necessity of repentance;" 1. The urgency of the case: sinners must either repent or perish: 2. The reasonableness of repentance: having done wrong, we ought to repent, and act most unreasonably if we do not: 3. The obligation sinners are under to repent, both from this reasonableness of the injunction, and the authority of that God who injoins it: and, 4. The additional guilt contracted by impenitency. As the same arguments frequently prove the necessity of repentance, in more than one of these senses, I thought it would better prevent needless repetition and obscurity in point of method, to treat of the whole at once, than to divide them into different heads. Having thus stated the meaning of the term employed, to prevent ambiguity, and that all may know what we say and whereof we affirm, let us proceed to the proof.

And here, reader, I have no need to inquire into thy character, whether thou art moral or immoral, a sober man or a drunkard, a good or bad relation or member of society, a formal worshipper or profane. Granting all that any man can desire, supposing the character of the reader to be decent, amiable, and respectable among men, I will endeavour to shew him, and to shew all, their need of repentance.

I. "Because all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."—Few in comparison are acquainted with the extent, strictness, and spirituality of the law of God, as taking cognizance of every thought, word, action, intention, or disposition of the whole heart and life: requiring absolute perfection in all things, continued in even to the last moment of life. Few keep an exact

Digitized by Google

account of their own thoughts, words, and actions, with reference to this law, as the standard of duty and sin: consequently few are sensible, in any tolerable degree, how numerous, or rather how innumerable, their transgressions are. But most, or all, know, that in some instances they have offended God, by doing those actions which he hath forbidden, and leaving undone those which he hath commanded. Surely, reader, thy conscience will excuse me from further evincing this particular. Only listen to this faithful monitor: even now it arraigns, accuses, and condemns thee: and wert thou guilty only of one transgression, (instead of those millions which are noted in God's book of remembrance,) and shouldest thou die without repenting of that one sin: as sure as conscience now condemns thee, so sure will God condemn thee in that solemn day, "when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

One felony or murder fully proved insures condemnation, equally with ten thousand. "Therefore, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God;" because all have sinned: "And by the law is the knowledge of sin." It takes cognizance of, and condemns, every sin and every sinner; and consequently can justify none, who have once transgressed. But remember, that the number and heinousness of our transgressions, though they add nothing to the *certainty*, yet will add proportionably to the *greatness*, of the merited condemnation: and should add to the depth of our repentance. Could that man be found who had once, and but once, and in the smallest instance, failed of obedience, he would need repentance, it would be his duty, nor could he be saved in impenitence. How needful then repentance for him, whose sins exceed in number the hairs of his head, and equal the moments of his life! For him whose crimes are full of aggravation, and loudly call for vengeance!

II. The law which we have broken is "holy, just, and good."—There are laws in this land, which condemn the murderer and housebreaker to death. These are reasonable laws, of which none can disapprove, but those who are, or would be guilty of those crimes. We experience them to be the security of our persons, property, and repose. He who breaks these laws, is not only condemned by *them*, but in the judgment of every wise and honest man; and ought in reason to condemn himself like a penitent thief, allowing the justice of the punishment which he suffers. Luke xxiii. 41.

But Nebuchadnezzar made a law, commanding all his officers and servants to worship a golden image, on penalty of being cast into a furnace of fire; Darius made a law, forbidding any of his subjects to worship God for thirty days, on pain of being cast into the den of lions; and many such laws have the tyranny, caprice, and pride of imperious princes and rulers produced. They are however, evidently absurd and impious, and every man will abhor them, in proportion to his wisdom and goodness. The three pious Jews who broke Nebuchadnezzar's edict, and Daniel who transgressed that of Darius, were indeed condemned by the laws; but they have been admired for their courage, and constancy in *disobedience*, by all good men ever since. Nay, the very consciences of their enemies testified for them, that they had done nothing amiss. Nor would it have been right for them to have condemned themselves; but rather they might glory in serving God, and keeping a good conscience, in the face of danger and death.

Were the law of God in any degree like those oppressive edicts, we should have cause to be extremely grieved at the hardship put upon us, and alarmed at the sentence denounced against us; but we could not, with any propriety, condemn ourselves, or repent of our transgressions.

We ought not indeed to reply against God: but the absurdity of this presumption arises, not so much from the consideration of his irresistible power and uncontrollable sovereignty, as from that of his absolute perfection of justice and holiness. This we are bound humbly to allow and suppose, even when we cannot perceive it; and to silence all our rising objections by say-

Digitized by Google

ing, "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Yet God condescended himself to argue the matter with those who thought his ways unequal; he even proposes his conduct in his government of the world to our consideration, that we may see and adore his justice; and to our imitation, that we may be holy as he is holy: and the day of judgment will clear up all our difficulties, when the righteousness of God will be fully demonstrated, to the universal satisfaction of his holy creatures, and the confusion and silence of all his enemies. It is indeed blasphemy, to suppose the law of God unreasonable, and his government oppressive: but it is a blasphemy congenial to our depraved nature, of which in our hearts we are all guilty, and of which we are with difficulty cured; for "the carnal mind is enmity against God,—is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

As therefore no sinner can be truly penitent, till he is convinced that the law of God is holy, just, and good; we should first establish this point, in endeavouring to bring sinners to repentance. This is the apostolical method: St. Paul, arguing in the epistle to the Romans against justification by the law, aware of the false conclusions which men of corrupt minds would be ready to draw from his resonings, again and again purposely leaves his main subject, to assert and prove the goodness of the law notwithstanding. With one accord, also, do all the writers of the sacred volume speak honourably of the *moral* law, expressing their approbation of it, and delight in it: nor is there one exception to this rule. This may shew us the great importance of this part of the subject; and how dangerous some inconsiderate expressions are, into which several good men have been betrayed in their zeal for that *fundamental doctrine,—justification by faith alone.*

We may be sure that the law is holy, just, and good; because given by a holy, just, and good God, whose work is perfect: and because, after Adam's fall, when it became *morally* impracticable for any of his posterity to be justified by it: he is still pleased to continue them under it, judge them according to it, and condemn them to utter destruction for breaking it.* "Is there unrighteousness with God?" He would not do these things, if they were not perfectly just. If they appear unjust to us, it is owing to our ignorance, self-love, low thoughts of God, and favourable thoughts of sin. Nay, so far was God from repealing this law, or abating its strictness, after man's transgression, that he republished it from Mount Sinai with awful majesty: he requires every one who would escape condemnation at the day of judgment, to condemn himself now for his trangressions of it, and to seek forgiveness from his sovereign mercy; Nor would he even thus pardon one sinner, except as his own Son honoured the law, in our stead, by his perfect obedience and death upon the cross. Moreover he gives it into the hand of all believers as a rule of life, a standard of sin and holiness: yea, writes it in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Thus doth the most high God proclaim to the whole world his determination "to magnify the law, and make it honourable." And had we no other evidence of its excellency, this, being abundantly sufficient, ought fully to satisfy us; yea, to humble us in the dust for acting so unreasonably as to break it.

May we not, however, ourselves discern the reasonableness of it, notwithstanding our partiality in our own cause, and our love of sin? God is evidently

* All who die in unbelief perish for breaking this law: all who are saved, were thus condemned for breaking it; else why did Christ bear their sins for them? Some indeed talk of another and milder law: but where it is found, when promulgated, what it requires, who does keep it, or who is condemned for breaking it, hath never been, nor never can be, determined. Others express themselves very ambiguously about our obligations to keep the law, prior to the consideration of redemption. But "where there is no law there can be no transgression:" where there is no transgression, there can be no condemnation: and where no condemnation, no occasion for redemption. Thus we repeal the law and subvert the gospel. Surely we ought with precision to determine this matter; and to shew that man, as God's creature, is bound to obey his law; that sin is the transgression of the law; that the wages of sin is death; that Christ died (not for Adam's sin only, or mainly, but) for our tranagressions of the law: that they who perish, are condemned (not only or principally because Adam sinned, but) for their own sins; that upon believing in Christ, we are delivered from the condemnation of sinners, but are never released from the obedience we owe as creatures: and that the obligation to obey is enforced on us by most powerful additional motives taken from redemption.

Digitized by Google

the perfection of glory and beauty, * the Pattern and Fountain of loveliness; from whom all that is lovely in all creatures is an emanation, of whom it is a faint resemblance, which hath comparatively "no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth." In himself he is therefore worthy of all admiration, love, and worship. From him we derive our existence, and all that rendereth our existence comfortable: our obligations therefore to him, as our Creator and Benefactor, are immense; he deserves then our entire and unreserved gratitude. Infinite love and gratitude, though he is worthy of them, his law requires not, because we are not capable of them, nor doth it enjoin the love and service of an angel; because he hath not endowed us with angelic capacities. The law runs thus: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength:" its requirements are proportioned, not to his worthiness but to our capacities. Of this love the man of the slenderest abilities is equally capable with the sublimest genius; the infant as the aged. In proportion to the superiority or inferiority of capacity, more or less is required: if it be honestly *our all*, the law demands no more.

But the law makes no allowance for our disinclination and indisposition to love and serve God with *our all;* because this is that very malignity of heart which renders us abominable in his sight. Every degree of this temper is a degree of enmity unto God: the very disposition arises from pride, love of the world, and love of sin; and in proportion as it prevails, is contempt of God in comparison with the world, sin, and self. It is therefore in itself infinitely unreasonable, totally inexcusable, and the very temper of the devil; who is completely detestable, because completely of this abominable disposition. † When we therefore show that the law is holy, just, and good, because exactly level to our capacities, we mean our *natural powers*, not our *moral dispositions:* the want of the former proportionably excuses, the want of the latter proportionably aggravates, every failure of any given degree of service. Man, not having the powers of an angel, is excusable in not performing the services of an angel: but being of an unholy disposition, he is therefore the more inexcusable in any particular act of unholiness; seeing it appears that it was no inadvertency, but the rooted disposition of his heart.

To love and serve God with our all, is the substance of the requirements of the law in the first table. And what can be more reasonable? Can there be any difficulty in loving one who is perfectly lovely, being thankful for such a Friend, or serving such a master, except what arises from the inexcusable badness of our hearts; For this we are condemned, for this we ought to condemn ourselves, "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."

* Psalm l. 2. Out of Zion, the *Perfection of Beauty, GOD* hath shined.

† This disposition is properly original sin, the effect of Adam's transgression. Therefore he, as the root, and we in him, as the branches, lost God's favour and image, and became liable to and fit for destruction. That this disposition is propagated by natural generation cannot reasonably be denied: that it is properly the punishment of Adam's sin, seems capable of Scriptural proof. If we cannot clearly perceive the justice of this, we must silence our objections thus: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" True penitents read their own character, and see their own picture, in Adam's conduct, and are humbled for original sin, as the fountain of all their actual transgressions. But as it is always either disputed, neglected, or abused, until the heart be otherwise humbled, I did not think it proper particularly to insist upon it in this discourse. Whilst some appear to lay an undue stress on Adam's transgression, and speak as if it were the only sin for which we were condemned, or Christ died: others totally deny and revile the doctrine of the fall; contending that man now is just such a creature, or nearly, with respect to his moral character and dispositions, as God originally created him. But the apostle Paul more than intimates that the image of God consists in righteousness and true holiness. Now we know that God created man in his own IMAGE: he also made him upright, and pronounced him very good. The question therefore is, what man now is. If experience and observation prove him to be naturally and universally prone to evil, and averse from good; and if the Scripture pronounce him *evil*, and abominable, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart to be only evil continually; he must be fallen from what he was originally. Ingratitude, enmity to God, pride, ambition, envy, malice, lust, falsehood, and covetousness, can form no part of the image of a holy God; or of that uprightness in which man was first made. But he must be very hardy, who should deny them to form a part of man's present character. Nor can we suppose the God of truth would first pronounce man very good, and afterwards, without any intervening change, so often declare him altogether abominable. How much more does it become our narrow capacities, and proneness to mistake, to rest satisfied with the Scriptural account; "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners;" and to adore the depths which we cannot fathom: than in the pride of philosophy and metaphysics, with such scanty information, to decide upon what we cannot comprehend, and, with daring temerity, to utter such words, as more than seem to be injurious to the divine character!

Digitized by Google

To love all men with equal estimation and benevolence is the substance of the second table: and we need only suppose this law given to our neighbours alone, as the rule of their conduct towards us, in order to perceive its excellency. What lovely, what happy creatures should we be, and what a delightful world would this prove, were all perfectly obedient! None is, or can be miserable, but the transgressor, or they whom transgressors injure. How excellent then this law, which provides for the happiness of the world so completely, that by transgression alone could men become in any degree miserable! Ought we not then to repent of our disobedience, our continual disobedience, and especially of our entire depravity of disposition, which renders us *morally* incapable of obedience.

Let every precept be impartially examined, and these things will appear with still more convincing evidence. For instance; "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy." Is it not highly reasonable that we should devote this portion of our time to Him, to whom the whole belongs? Would not our best interests in connection with the glory of God, be promoted by obeying this commandment? "These things he commands us for our good." How unreasonable then our disobedience! What need have we to repent of forgetting and neglecting to hallow the Sabbath!

Again, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." As we all judge it reasonable that others should thus behave to us: let conscience determine, whether we have not done wrong in and ought not to repent of, transgressing this rule, in our conduct to others. We might easily examine other precepts, and shew them to be equally reasonable. Yea, every one of them is so; and therefore every deviation from perfect obedience is entirely unreasonable. There is nothing in the whole law of God grievous in itself, or difficult, except to our proud and carnal hearts.—David and Paul, men after God's own heart, greatly loved and delighted in God's law; Christ, being perfectly holy, entirely delighted in it and perfectly obeyed it: angels and saints in glory enjoy full liberty in obeying it, and find it perfect felicity: yea, God himself, though absolute Sovereign, is pleased to observe in his own conduct, the same rules which he prescribes for ours (as far as consists with his majesty and authority;) his law is the transcript of his own holiness; and when he requires our obedience, he only says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." In proportion as we bear his image, we take pleasure in his precepts, and find obedience easy and natural: in proportion as we resemble Satan, we hate the law, and find obedience irksome, arduous, impossible. How excellent then this law! how vile are we who have broken it! What need have we to repent of our unreasonable conduct.

III. All have need to repent, because all have by sin absolutely destroyed themselves.—A trifling penalty incurred by transgression might reasonably have been disregarded. When human laws only inflict small fines, short imprisonment, or burning in the hand, offenders may treat such penalties with indifference: but when excruciating tortures and ignominious death, are the threatened punishment; when the sentence is impartially and rigorously inflicted: when the crime is fully proved, and the prisoner closely confined; the most stubborn spirit bends, the stoutest heart is intimidated, and indifference is madness.—Art thou then, sinner, careless and unconcerned, in a case infinitely more tremendous? Canst thou find a heart for gay amusements, or coolly apply to worldly pursuits, whilst "the wrath of God abideth upon thee," the law thunders out a dreadful curse against thee, death closely pursues thee, everlasting misery awaits thee? That God whom thou hast offended, is at once the Witness, the Judge, and the Avenger of thy crimes: thou canst not hide thy transgressions from his all-seeing eye: thou canst not flee from his omnipresence, resist his almighty power, bribe his inflexible justice, or endure his awful vengeance. The sentence, if thou die impenitent, is already published in the Judge's own words: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Are not

Digitized by Google

these words of the loving Saviour most dreadful? "Can thy hands be strong, or can thy heart endure," when they shall sound in thy affrighted ear? Is this "the wrath to come," surely, inevitably to come, upon an ungodly world? Are these his words, who saith, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away?" Art thou one of the very persons concerned? Art thou a transgressor of the law? Doth the word of God run thus: "Cursed is every one, who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them?" And dost thou still remain unconcerned? Indeed, were there no way of escape, it would not be worth while to torment thyself before the time. "But there is forgiveness with God," there is a space allowed for repentance, a way of salvation, a proclamation of mercy: and dost thou still trifle, and not apply thyself immediately to seek deliverance from "the wrath to come?"

Surely these considerations, if laid to heart in a manner suitable to their certainty and importance, would damp the vain mirth of an ungodly world, and turn their songs and laughter into bitter lamentations. Let me, my fellow sinners, recommend the apostle's advice to you: "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into heaviness," James iv. 9. Thus shall your godly sorrow for sin, "work repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

IV. The necessity of repentance appears from the justice of this sentence, severe as it may seem.—Sinners are ready to say, "I only gratify my natural inclinations, and enjoy a little irregular pleasure for a few years; and can it consist with the justice and goodness of God to punish me with everlasting misery? Is there any proportion between the crime and the punishment? But consider, poor deluded man, the infinite majesty, purity, and goodness of that God, against whom thy sins are committed: consider that "his is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever:" consider thy relations to him, as his creature, his property, his subject; and the reasonableness of his claim to thy love and obedience, resulting both from his own excellency and authority, and the benefits which he hath conferred on thee: consider the reasonableness of his law, the pleasantness of his service, the happiness of his subjects, and the noble rewards of obedience: then estimate, if thou art able, what injustice, ingratitude, rebellion, contempt, enmity, and obstinacy, there is in sin, and what punishment is adequate to its deservings.

If a man injure his equal, it is evil; if he injure his superior it is worse. If a child curse, smite, or murder his parent, his conduct is baser than it would have been had he thus treated a stranger or an equal. The wiser, better and more indulgent the parent, the more atrocious is the crime of the unnatural, ungrateful child. Should a son murder an excellent parent, in the midst of a recent profusion of kindness, without any provocation or motive, except in order to the more unrestrained gratification of some vile passion; what punishment should we deem too severe for the parricide? Add, further, the relation of sovereign to that of parent; a rightful, wise, just, clement sovereign, the common father of his people. For a persecuted David to stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, though a cruel treacherous Saul, would have been highly criminal: how much more to murder a prince of consummate excellency, without the least provocation! for his favourite, on whom his bounty had been lavished, to be the assassin! But for his son, his indulged son, to break through all obligations, human and divine, and murder his father and prince at once, that he might more unrestrainedly indulge his lusts, would stamp the action with stupendous baseness! When Absalom designed to act this monstrous part against the man of God's own heart, even the ill-judged lenity of the too indulgent parent was not permitted to rescue the traitor from deserved punishment.—According to the plainest dictates of human reason, the malignity of the action must rise in proportion to the authority and excellency of the party offended, and the offender's relation and obligations to him. In human affairs, this method of computing the comparative criminality of offences, and proportioning punish-

Digitized by Google

ments, is generally adopted amongst civilized nations. If we are allowed to compute in the same method *the evil of sin*, (and why should we not?) what heart can conceive, or tongue express, or numbers reach, the evil of every offence committed against the majesty of God? By arguments and meditations of this kind, we may arrive at some feeble conception of the odiousness of transgressing the divine law: but he alone, who sees all things exactly as they are, is the competent Judge: and my design is not to demonstrate a matter before doubtful, but to illustrate the reasonableness of that which is certainly true. Whether we see and allow it, or not, sin is infinitely evil, and deserving of eternal punishment. Thus He hath determined, "whose judgment we know to be according unto truth." All his loyal subjects on earth join in praising him, "as righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." All the inhabitants of heaven thus praise him, even while "the smoke of the torments of the wicked ascendeth up for ever and ever." None but rebels think the sentence too severe. If we would not have our lot with *them* in another world, let us not rank ourselves among them in this: but let us say, with holy Job, "I have uttered things which I understood not: things too wonderful for me, which I know not." "I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther." Yea, truly, "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world shall appear guilty before God;" nay, they "shall be speechless" when ordered to be cast into outward darkness, "where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth."—What cause then have all to repent, who have justly merited so dreadful a punishment!

V. All have cause of, and need for, repentance: because God will most certainly inflict this punishment upon all the impenitent with unabating severity. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Let no man deceive you with vain words: the impenitent sinner shall certainly spend eternity "in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." An awakening truth which Satan and his instruments have in all ages been opposing; but in none more zealously, ingeniously, and, alas! successfully, than in this: for that great deceiver knows that nothing so effectually increases the number of the damned, as the disbelief of eternal damnation. "Ye shall not surely die," was the first temptation of this murderer of souls: and still his kingdom is supported by the same insinuation. But if there be any meaning in words, if the idea of eternal misery can be conveyed in human language, and if the Bible be the word of God, then the wicked "shall go into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT." Though God is rich in mercy, though there is plenteous redemption in the blood of Christ; yet, neither the mercy of God, nor the blood of Christ, avail for any but the penitent: to others, all the threatenings of the law alone belong: nor have they any part or lot in the gospel; except the deeper condemnation of "neglecting such great salvation," and abusing the mercy of God, and the redemption of Christ, into an encouragement to continue in sin. Such sinners "are a people who have no understanding, therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them." "Oh, consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Psalm l. 22.

VI. The necessity of repentance is further evinced by considering the reasonableness of this awful determination. There is a controversy betwixt God and sinners, and blame must rest somewhere. Either God is indeed chargeable with blame, for enacting so strict a law, and annexing so dreadful a penalty on transgressors; or the sinner is as much to blame as this penalty implies, for breaking the law. To harbour one moment the supposition, that any part of the blame belongs to God, is blasphemous; doubtless the whole fault belongs to the sinner. Yet every impenitent sinner, in excusing himself, condemns God. "Wilt thou," saith he to Job, "disannul judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" Job, xl. 8. Why did the sinner break the law, if he did not think it too strict? Doth he *pretend* it was by surprise or sudden temptation, through inadver-

Digitized by Google

tency, and not deliberate rebellion?* Then why doth he not repent? His impenitence for the past, and his present continuance in transgression, strongly imply a most injurious censure of the law, as inconsistent with his happiness: and his vindication of himself and his conduct, implies a censure on the justice of God in condemning sinners, equally injurious.

Now, should God pardon a sinner who thus excuses himself, and tacitly condemns him, he would seem to allow the excuse, and plead guilty to the charge; so that the honour of God and the salvation of an impenitent sinner, are irreconcileable contradictions: but God, conscious of his own most perfect justice, and jealous of his own glory, would sooner leave all the world to perish for ever, than thus consent to his own dishonour. Every hope, which any man entertains of pardon in impenitency, involves the absurd supposition, when carefully investigated, that God will dishonour himself, to humour and favour a proud obstinate rebel. Every such hope is pregnant with the presumption spoken of by Moses. "Lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it cometh to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." Deut. xxix. 18—20. Let us, beloved, attend carefully to such plain warnings of the word of God, that we may be armed against the temptations of Satan, and the rising presumption of our own hearts.

VII. The necessity of repentance is further manifested by reflecting, that no impenitent sinner can cordially approve of the salvation, revealed in the word of God. Indeed, did the gospel require men confidently to believe that *their* sins are already pardoned, and that all the blessings of salvation are already theirs, though they are destitute of every gracious disposition, as some have incautiously advanced; no scheme could better suit the pride and carnality of an impenitent heart. This however, is not the true gospel of Christ, but another gospel, which must be opposed, even though "preached by an angel from heaven." All are bound to believe that God will forgive the vilest of sinners, who repent and believe in Christ: otherwise they make God a liar: for he hath attested it. When by scriptural evidence, (even by holy dispositions produced, and holy actions performed,) I am sure that *my* faith is living, and *my* repentance genuine, I may be humbly sure, that *my* sins are forgiven, and that *I* am a child of God, and an heir of glory; but not before. That I shall be welcome, if I come aright, I may be sure before I come: that I have come aright, and am accepted, I can only be assured by the effects I am conscious of, and the fruits of righteousness produced.

The way in which forgiveness and salvation are actually conferred upon sinners, may be thus illustrated. A state-criminal, under sentence of death, is thus addressed by his prince: "You deserve to suffer the rigour of your sentence: no excuse can be made for your rebellion, nor one alleviating circumstance found in your case: yet, by my own clemency, I am disposed to shew mercy, so that I may but do it honourably; and so, as effectually to express my disapprobation of your crime for an example to others. I will, therefore, seat myself upon my royal throne, surrounded by my nobles, and multitudes of my subjects, as witnesses of your submission and my clemency. Do you then approach and prostrate yourself in my presence, publicly and humbly confess your guilt, acknowledge you justly merit to be immediately led to execution, then throw yourself upon my royal mercy, and crave your

* This is often the case of the true believer, who delights in the law of God, and hates evil, yet is surprised into the commission of that which he abhors, and breaks the law that he loves; but recovering from the surprise, he directly and deeply repents. But this excuse is merely a pretence in others, by which they cover a rooted enmity to the law, an habitual love of sin; and their impenitence discovers their hypocrisy.

Digitized by Google

life at my hands. In this humbling method, and in no other, will I forgive your crimes, and become your friend."—I speak not here of that redemption price which Immanuel paid, that "God might be just and the justifier of him who believeth;" but merely of the glory of God's justice in our condemnation, and of his mercy in our salvation; which he requires to be unreservedly and cordially acknowledged by every one who comes to him for pardon.

But an impenitent sinner always rejects, and generally is affronted with, this preliminary of peace and reconciliation. He stands upon his vindication, and holds fast his pleas and excuses. If he allow that he hath his faults, he insists that he hath his virtues, and expects that they should be accepted by way of compensation. He hopes also to do something more by way of atoning for his faults; and thinks it would be hard, and indeed palpably unjust, to send him, with all his imagined good qualities, sincere obedience, and good intentions, to keep company with thieves, murderers, and prostitutes in the bottomless pit. Such indeed is the self-love and self-partiality of mankind, that you will find few, if any, even of the vilest characters, who have not something of this kind to plead in arrest of judgment: every man's own faults seem to himself more venial, than those of other men, and his supposed good qualities and actions more estimable; and thus the sinner "flatters himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful." But, especially, this is the grand objection of the rich, the moral, and the pharisaical. These would bid high and do much, yea, almost any thing but this, which is so intolerably mortifying to their self-preference. On this ground principally numbers reject the gospel, part from Christ, and come short of salvation: as "there is no difference; for all have sinned," all are condemned, none can make satisfaction: all then that are saved must condemn themselves, and submit to be saved by grace alone, through faith in the Son of God. But whilst such persons proudly hesitate and object, the publicans and harlots, being brought to true repentance, approve of this humbling method, and enter into the kingdom of heaven before them.

VIII. Without repentance there can be no preparation of heart for that "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord." All true Christians are zealous of good works, being taught by "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." The Christian indeed is very far from perfection in good works, and therefore he cannot be justified by them; neither does he at all depend on them: but, by his sincere obedience, his unreserved observation of Christ's commands, he proves that he is a true believer, and no hypocrite; he glorifies God, adorns the gospel, and promotes the real good of mankind.

But by deep repentance alone is the heart prepared for such a holy conduct. Without this, there can be no "ceasing to do evil, or learning to do well;" no "hating the evil, and loving the good;" no "abhoring the evil, or cleaving to that which is good." Without repentance we cannot really love God, desire his glory, reverence his majesty, or delight in his law and service. Mere moral and relative good behaviour in the world, without any due regard to God; or mere external performances in religion, may subsist without repentance: but that holiness which respects the authority of God, as Law-giver and Judge, which springs from love of him and his commandments, and is intentionally directed to his glory, can only be produced from a heart renewed unto repentance.

Especially that deep sense of personal unworthiness, which is peculiar to the true penitent, prepares the heart to exercise genuine gratitude, contentment, patience, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies. These dispositions and duties form a very conspicuous part of the Christian character, as delineated in the sacred Scriptures: but no impenitent man can really exercise these graces, or perform these duties, whatever appearances he may occasionally assume. Yet if this be not our character and conduct,

Digitized by Google

our hope is merely presumption, our profession, hypocrisy: "for if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." So that without repentance no man can serve God here, or be saved in the world to come.

Lastly, Without repentance there can be no meetness for heaven. Without a correspondent disposition, without an appetite prepared for the object, there can be no gratification. A holy heart relishes and delights in holiness, and is thus prepared for the enjoyment of a holy heaven. But he who despises and disrelishes holiness in this world, could find no happiness in that place, where all the joys are holy, and where consequently all the employments would be irksome to him. No impenitent sinner has this "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light;" because he cannot relish and delight in holiness: for as soon as he becomes of this disposition, he must in proportion abhor unholiness, and abhor himself for his sinfulness; that is to say, he must repent of his sins.

The whole company of the redeemed are likewise represented as joining in cordial and unreserved praises unto God and the Lamb; giving all the glory of their salvation to the rich mercy of the Father, and the precious blood of the Saviour. These praises imply an acknowledgment of the justice of the sentence executed upon the ungodly: nay, they imply that *they* themselves might justly, and should certainly, have perished with their fellow-rebels, had not Jesus interposed with his atoning blood. But could any impenitent sinner join this worship with sincere delight? Many openly arraign the conduct of the Judge in condemning sinners to eternal misery: and every impenitent heart is disposed to quarrel with this part of the divine conduct. Nor would the case be different, were it possible for a person of this description to enter into heaven: he would secretly condemn his Maker for severity, in eternally punishing others for the very crimes which he himself had committed, and never repented of; he must dissent from those praises in his heart, which arise from a principle of which he allows not; namely, that distinguishing grace and atoning blood have made all the difference between him and those in hell: he could not in sincerity allow that God would have been glorious, though he had left him to perish. But there is neither hypocrisy, nor discordant voice, nor unholiness, in these happy mansions; therefore no impenitent sinner shall ever enter into them.

Because our self-love renders us so unwilling to believe this important truth; because Satan with such artifice endeavours to draw off our attention from it; because we are so reluctant of ourselves duly to consider it; and because the entangling pursuits and interests, the pleasures, maxims, and examples of the world, have such a tendency to lull us into a fatal security in this respect; I have the more importunately laboured these multiplied demonstrations of the necessity of repentance. Surely, sinner, I have gained my point, fixed thy attention, and fully convinced thee, that thou hast cause to repent, oughtest to repent, and must either repent or perish. Surely thy heart is by this time in some measure suitably affected with the important subject; and thou art even now, with pressing anxiety, inquiring, "What then is repentance?" Beseeching the Lord to assist and bless the attempt, I shall endeavour with all possible seriousness and plainness, to satisfy this inquiry.

PART SECOND.

The Nature of Repentance.

I SHALL not spend my time in critically inquiring into the etymology, or the meaning of the words which are translated repentance in our version of the

Digitized by Google

Bible. Suffice it to observe that μεταμελεσθαι, one word frequently used, signifies to *be afterwards careful or uneasy:* and μετανοια, that more commonly used, signifies a *change of mind,* of judgment and disposition; which ideas severally and conjunctly express the nature of repentance, as it may more fully be learned from the general tenour of the Scriptures. I would then define true repentance to be "A genuine sorrow for sin, attended with a real inclination to undo, if it were possible, all that we have sinfully done; and consequently an endeavour, as far as we have it in our power, to counteract the consequences of our former evil conduct; with a determination of mind, through divine grace, to walk for the future in newness of life, evidenced to be sincere by "fruits meet for repentance;" that is, by all holy dispositions, words, and actions. Enlarging on this definition, I shall have an opportunity of expressing my sentiments on the nature of real repentance, and distinguishing it from various counterfeits.

I. Repentance comprehends "a *genuine* sorrow for sin." This implies that there is a *spurious* sorrow on account of sin, which a man may have to excess without real repentance. This kind of sorrow arises from self-love, alarmed with the fear of punishment, without regard to the just desert of it. A man is indeed grieved; yet not that he hath sinned, but that God exceedingly hates sin, is determined to punish it, and is able to execute this determination in spite of all opposition. He is extremely sorry that the law is so very strict, and greatly terrified when he reflects on the danger to which he stands exposed: but he is not grieved at heart for the odious ungrateful part he hath acted. In human affairs, many, under condemnation of death, appear thus penitent, whose insincerity is detected by a pardon, and they rush upon the commission of new crimes. Many penitents of this description we meet with on sick-beds, or in circumstances of imminent danger: they are under excessive terrors, shed abundance of tears, and make many fair promises; but when the alarm is over, their repentance is repented of, and their concern lost in company and worldly pursuits. They likewise abound among the hearers of the gospel. Like Felix, when the word of God is brought home to their consciences, they tremble, and perhaps weep: but they are soon quieted; and return to the pursuit of their worldly interests and pleasures with unabated alacrity: many of these embrace false and loose schemes of religion, are buoyed up with presumptuous hopes, and *practically* say, "let us sin on, that grace may abound." Having got over their alarm, their repentance is finished; they live without remorse for the past, or tenderness of conscience for the present, nor have they any trouble in general about their sins; except perchance, some outrage to common decency shame them before their fellow-sinners.

These transient alarms and convictions are most effectually made use of by Satan, to keep men from true repentance. A general persuasion prevails, that we ought to repent, though few understand the real nature of repentance. However, this general persuasion frequently excites, from time to time, considerable uneasiness of conscience to him who considers himself impenitent. But when men falsely imagine that they have repented, or do repent, this uneasiness ceases, and they continue impenitent with a quiet mind.

Let me here entreat the reader to pause, and put a few questions on the subject to himself. "Has it not been thus with me? Is it not so to this hour? Do I not keep my conscience from reproaching me, or silence its friendly admonitions, by some general apprehension, that I am at times a penitent?"—I beseech thee leave not this consideration, till thou hast carefully examined it, as in the sight of God, and with the day of judgment before thine eyes. Most certain it is that multitudes live all their lives in a continued course of sinning and repenting *in this way;* and at length die impenitent.

But a man may be *really* sorry for particular sins, without being a true penitent. Conscience sometimes so reproaches men for certain enormous

Digitized by Google

violations of all laws, human and divine, as to render them a terror to themselves: yea, they are exceedingly sorry that they ever committed those particular crimes, and would gladly undo them were it possible: and yet this hath nothing in it of the nature of true repentance. Thus Judas repented of betraying Christ, confessing his guilt, making restitution, and even seeking to prevent the consequences of his base treachery; indeed he was so stung with remorse, that he could not live under the anguish, but became his own executioner. Yet he was not a true penitent; for the Lord assures us, "It had been good for that man had he never been born."

And we do not find that he ever expressed the least remorse for his hypocrisy, his covetousness, or his other wickedness of heart and life, which he had continued in all his days. The case is often the same with murderers, who are unspeakably troubled for one act of violence to a fellow-creature; but not in the least concerned for all the contempt, ingratitude, and enmity, of which they have been guilty towards God. And the same is often observable in respect of many other notorious offenders. This sorrow is not excited by a conviction (resulting from knowledge and reflection,) of deep criminality, in having sinned heinously by disobeying a good God, and breaking a good law; but it arises from the horror of having done violence to natural light and their own consciences, to that degree, that none of their former *excuses and pretences* can pacify them: God having preserved thus much of himself and of his law in our reason and conscience, as a check upon natural depravity, and to bridle the headstrong corruptions of those, who neither fear him nor regard men; yet cannot act out all their evil purposes, without becoming their own tormentors.

But the sorrow of a true penitent is *for sin*, as committed against God, being rebellion against his rightful authority, and transgression of his holy law. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Psalm li. 4. He mourns after a godly sort, with a godly sorrow, or a sorrow which directly regards God. 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10. His sorrow springs from the consideration of the majesty, purity, and excellency of that glorious Being whom he hath offended, the reasonableness of the law which he hath transgressed, the obligations to obedience which he hath violated, the injustice and ingratitude of which he hath been guilty, and the complicated odiousness of his conduct. As every sin partakes of the same nature, and implies the same disregard to God, he mourns for all, and every one; whether man were injured by it or not; whether it were secret or open; a sin of omission, or of commission; and whether it were or were not, contrary to the notions, maxims, customs, and allowance of the world. Yea, every sinful temper, imagination, and inclination; every idle, unprofitable word; every evil action of his whole life, as upon examination it recurs to his remembrance, excites afresh his godly sorrow. In proportion as he recollects the numberless instances of God's unwearied patience and kindness to him, in former years, he becomes more sensible of his own ingratitude, forgetfulness, and disobedience: and the further he is enlightened to see the glory of God, the more hateful all sin appears, and the more he mourns over his own offences.

As therefore the glory of the divine character shines forth more illustriously from the person and suffering of Jesus, than from all the other works of God: the true penitent's sorrow will be more or less intense, in proportion to the degree of his spiritual apprehensions, and realizing views, of that great event. When with fixed attention he can meditate on the divine Surety for sinners, agonizing in the garden and expiring on the cross; when he can realize to his mind, in the exercise of faith, who he was that suffered; and what he endured from the cruelty and insult of men, the power and malice of Satan, and the avenging justice of the Father; and wherefore he suffered, even that he might bear our sins, and expiate our guilt: then, in an especial manner, his mind is deeply impressed with admiring views of the awful holiness and justice, and the unfathomable love

Digitized by Google

and compassion of God: then sin appears to his mind peculiarly odious, as committed against a God of such a lovely and loving character: then he becomes abominable in his own eyes, and mourns for his sins with peculiar humiliation. They now become a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear; he goes mourning for them all the day long, yet mourns that he can mourn no more, is ashamed that he is no more affected, and abhors himself for the remaining hardness of his heart.

He now no longer vindicates his conduct, or extenuates his crimes: his mouth is stopped, his guilt is manifest, and he condemns himself. His judgement of his own character is now totally changed; he used to admire and approve, now he abhors and loathes himself: he was disposed to exalt himself, now he becomes more and more disposed to self-abasement. Then turning his thoughts inward, he traces back the streams of sin which have polluted his life, to that fountain of iniquity in his heart, from whence they sprang. "Behold," says he, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm li. 5.—Abased in himself, and impressed with an awful sense of the holy majesty of God, he would despond, yea, at length absolutely despair, were he not supported by discoveries of the rich mercy of God, and the precious salvation of the gospel. Yet, thus encouraged, he indeed ventures to speak unto the Lord, but it is in the publican's self-abased frame of spirit, and humble words, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

This deep humiliation of soul renders a man backward to conclude his repentance genuine, his faith sincere, and his sins forgiven. These blessings appear in his eyes so large, his own character so vile, and his humiliation so small, in comparison with what he is conscious it ought to be, that he can hardly raise his hopes so high: and he is so aware of the wickedness of his heart, and discovers so much of Satan's artifice, that he fears being imposed on by a false peace, where eternity is at stake. But when this hope springs up in his heart, and he discovers, by comparing it with the Scripture, with fervent prayer, that "it is the hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" this is so far from drying up his tears, and terminating his repentance, that it vastly enlarges and purifies his godly sorrow; which is now attended with a sweetness far exceeding earthly joy. The fuller assurance he possesses, that Jesus "was wounded for *his* transgressions, and was bruised for his iniquities," the more he abhors his sins and loathes himself. Here he sees with personal application, what wrath sin merited; what punishment he was worthy of; when a God of such immense compassion would not pardon one sin, without such a satisfaction: yea, would rather not spare his own Son, but be pleased to bruise Him in whom his soul delighted, than either leave sin unpunished, or sinful men to perish!

His own concern in this transaction directs his attention peculiarly to it. "The Father loved *him* and gave his beloved Son to die for *him*: Christ loved *him*, and gave himself for him, and interceded for him;" and thus he was spared and borne with all the years of his rebellion, whilst many others were cut off in their sins. At length "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved him, even when dead in sins, quickened him" by his Spirit; thus born of God, he was pardoned, justified, and adopted into God's family, and numbered amongst the heirs of eternal glory; to which he is sealed by the graces and consolations of the Holy Spirit; as these are the earnest of the promised inheritance. Such discoveries and prospects elevate the soul to a degree of adoring love and gratitude, before unknown; and this increases the penitent's self-abasement and godly sorrow. His heart is even broken, and as it were melted, when he considers the number and odiousness of the crimes committed against this glorious and gracious God, who was all the while full of love to him. His character is stamped, "a mourner that shall be comforted;" yet his is a sweet sorrow: whilst with tears of contrition and gratitude, he praises a pardoning God and a bleeding Saviour, he realizes the paradox, "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;" except that in some

Digitized by Google

dark seasons his heart is insensible, both to the motions of godly sorrow, and of holy joy. These alternate variations in the frames of his spirit, the true Christian experiences through the remainder of his life. His more melting seasons of godly sorrow are blended with, and prepare the way for, his sweetest consolations; which again increase and purify his mourning for sin; as he then most clearly perceives, what a gracious and glorious God he hath offended, and how vile he hath been. Thus ingenuous sorrow and holy joy, reciprocally assist one another; they intermingle with, and are proportioned to each other, in his daily experience; till at length death closes the varied scene. Then "God wipes away all tears from his eyes;" "the days of his mourning are ended;" he shall eternally be comforted, and plenteously reap the harvest which here he sowed in tears. I do not mean to determine any thing concerning the degree in which true penitents obtain these spiritual discoveries, or experience these flowing affections, and melting frames. It is enough if we can describe the distinguishing nature of true repentance. True grace is of the same nature and tendency, whether we have much or little of it.

If, then, the genuine sorrow for sin required in Scripture has been described, it is no objection to say, that many true Christians have very little of these views and affections; because that is only to say, in other words, that they have but little true repentance; or (which amounts to the same thing) have but little true grace. And the less they have of these things, the less evident is their conversion; the more need have "they to examine themselves whether they be in the faith;" and to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure." Certainly we must not adulterate the word of God, that we may accommodate it to the experience of lukewarm professors, in a day when "iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold." This would be the way to reduce things from bad to worse, till true religion vanished from among us. We must still keep to the standard of God's word, the experience of Scriptural saints, and the specimen of primitive Christians; endeavouring to stir up men's minds to imitate these illustrious examples. And, on careful examination, I trust, the above description of godly sorrow will be found Scriptural: all real Christians have experienced something of it, and habitually do experience it: and the more distinct their views, the more enlarged their affections, and the deeper their contrition: the more evidently they are true penitents, and entitled to all the consolations belonging to that character.

Nor is the order in which these things are experienced, at all material, provided the godly sorrow be of the proper nature and tendency: yet I would just observe, that at all times it is begun before *assured* hope of salvation; otherwise pardon and the *assurance of it* would be vouchsafed to impenitent sinners; but it is much enlarged by this assurance, wherever it is scripturally possessed; as the believer now "looks upon him whom he hath pierced, and mourns." It begins previously to the sense of pardoning love, and is perfected by it; because the believer's love to the Lord is thus increased, and this increases sorrow for having offended him. Let this be well digested, and then let us proceed to observe that,

II. Repentance is "attended with a real inclination to undo, if it were possible, all that we have sinfully done; and consequently with an endeavour, as far as we have it in our power, to counteract the consequences of our former evil conduct." This frame of spirit will manifest itself,

1. By ingenuous confession of our sins to the glory of that God, whom by sin we have dishonoured. Thus Joshua exhorts Achan; "My son, give glory to the Lord, and make confession unto him." The commission of sin impeaches the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God; and seems to say, that he hath forbidden us something conducive to our real happiness. Obstinacy in sin defies his power, dares his vengeance, and despises his truth and holiness; to vindicate ourselves, and cover our sins, arraigns the righteousness of his threatenings and judgments, or affronts his omniscience. Thus the

Digitized by Google

sinner robs God of his glory. What he hath done cannot be undone: nor is it in his power to make satisfaction for the injustice, of which he hath been guilty, except he bear the eternal punishment. Convinced of this, the true penitent flees for refuge to the atoning blood of Jesus. But, though he cannot make satisfaction for his sins, or do any thing towards meriting pardon or reward: (for this he knows must be wholly of free mercy,) yet what he can do, he will. He will, both in secret and openly, on all proper occasions, make full and unreserved confession of his crimes, and condemn himself; and thus glorify God's justice and mercy; glorify his law, as "the ministration of condemnation," and his gospel as "the ministration of righteousness:" for "both are glorious, though the latter exceeded in glory." 2 Cor. iii. 7—11. All who have even a superficial acquaintance with the Bible, know that this is every where spoken of, as an essential part of true repentance, and often put for the whole of it: I shall not therefore further dwell on it, but shall confine myself to two observations. *First*, That secret sins require only secret confession unto that God who knoweth and seeth in secret: but public scandals require public acknowledgments: that we may openly honour God by our confession, as we have dishonoured him openly by our conduct. Thus when David had, by adultery and murder, given cause to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; by writing and publishing the fifty-first psalm, he publicly took shame to himself, even before his own servants, subjects, and children: and thus gave glory unto God, and stopped the blasphemy of the ungodly. *Secondly*, That the true penitent, though general in his public confession, should be, and will be, very particular in his secret confession; reviewing, enumerating and bemoaning all his sins, of every sort, with all their various aggravations.

2. This disposition of mind will influence the penitent to make ample restitution to those whom he hath defrauded or injured. Under the ceremonial law, the trespass-offering was to be accompanied by restitution to the injured party. Lev. vi. 1—7. The plain meaning of which institution Christ hath given us in his Sermon on the Mount: "If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first* be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Thus it was that Zaccheus evidenced the sincerity of his repentance: and thus every sincere convert, with self-indignation, will haste to be rid of that accursed thing, dishonest gain: * with scrupulousness and diligence he will search for every remainder of it; he will restore it with interest to the injured, if he can: if not, he will give it to their relatives, and to the poor; and should he be unable to do this (which he will put himself to much inconvenience and self-denial rather than not effect,) it will be long the occasion of additional trouble of mind to him.—Let me ask thee, beloved reader, thinking thyself a penitent, whither thou hast impartially examined thyself on this score? whither thou hast imitated Zaccheus in this matter? Or art thou sure thou hast no cause, having never injured any man by fraud, violence, or extortion? I warn thee beforehand, that God will bring to light these hidden things of darkness, and fully investigate this matter, at the day of judgment. And no *unrighteous* persons, (2 Cor. vi. 9.) who, having injured their neighbours, love the gains of iniquity so well, as to refuse restitution, shall inherit the kingdom of God. This evidence of sincerity is so distinguishing, that I cannot but conclude, judging by the Bible, that all appearances of repentance, all pretences to experience, without this, are hypocritical and delusory. What shall we say then to many persons, who, having formerly under colour of law, been, *perhaps* unwillingly, injurious to their creditors, still keep them out of their just rights; perhaps see them struggling with those difficulties, into which their extravagance hath plunged them; whilst they themselves now live at ease, perhaps in affluence; and are well able, (if they could prevail with themselves to re-

* Who shaketh his hands from holding of bribes. Isaiah xxxiii. 15.

Digitized by Google

trench superfluous expences,) to make restitution, in whole, or in part; but will not, because not compelled by the law of the land. These persons evidently confound human laws with doing the will of God; and prefer wealth, indulgence, and the pride of life, to the golden rule of "doing unto others as they would they should do unto them." Whatever profession of religion any one, who acts thus, may make, his religion is vain, and a discourse upon repentance would be exceedingly defective, which did not bear testimony against this common and flagrant conduct.

Another evil, I am told, very frequent among persons professing evangelical religion, as well as others, is dealing in smuggled or contraband goods. This trade is in itself,—An evident violation of God's express command, Rom. xiii. 6, 7.—A robbery upon the community, which must be taxed to make up the deficiency: And aiding and abetting all the enormities that smugglers commit. But necessity is pretended. I suppose it is necessary in order to be rich. "But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into divers foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition: For the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

But our evil conduct may injure others, not only in their property, but in their reputation, in their connections, in their peace of mind, and in many other ways: and the true penitent, though he cannot undo what is past, yet will endeavour to counteract the mischief, at the expence of stooping to the most humiliating submission, of making the frankest acknowledgements, or by any method in his power, however contrary to the pride and self-love of the human heart.

3. This disposition of mind will induce a man to retract those false principles, which he has advanced, that may have a tendency to propagate or countenance infidelity or profaneness: and to counteract the consequence of his evil conduct, where it hath prejudiced men's minds against religion, or led them into sin, and emboldened them in it: or any ways tended to the dishonour of God, and the ruin of souls. Gladly would he undo this part of his conduct: it ever grieves him upon reflection: he is pained that the seed is sown, and springs up and grows, notwithstanding all his endeavours to the contrary. But as far as his retraction, his arguments, his persuasions, his example and influence can reach, he will endeavour to prevent the further progress of the mischief. In these and various other particulars, true repentance influences a man sincerely to desire and endeavour to counteract the tendency of his former evil conduct; but appearances of humiliation for sin may be and often are without this distinguishing effect. Thus Ahab humbled himself and was clothed in sackcloth, but neither restored Naboth's vineyard, nor ceased to commit iniquity.

III. True repentance is attended with a determination of mind, through divine grace, to walk for the future in newness of life, evidenced to be sincere by fruits meet for repentance: that is, by all holy dispositions, words, and actions.

This is at last the grand distinction betwixt true repentance, and all false appearances. Though men be abundant in sheding tears, and make the most humiliating confessions, or most ample restitution; though they openly retract their false principles, and are zealous in promoting true religion; though they relate the most plausible story of experiences, and profess to be favoured with the most glorious manifestations; though they have strong confidence, high affections, orthodox sentiments, exact judgment, and extensive knowledge: yet, except they "do works meet for repentance," all the rest is nothing, they are still in their sins. For the tree is known by the fruit; and "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Yea, though Cain's terror, Judas's confession and restitution, Pharaoh's fair promises, Ahab's humiliation, Herod's reverencing the prophet, hearing him gladly, and doing many things; the stony-ground hearer's joy; together with the tongue of men and angels, the gifts of miracles and prophecies, and the knowledge of all mysteries, were combined in one man,

Digitized by Google

they would not prove him a true penitent, so long as the love of one lust remained unmortified in his heart, or the practice of it was *allowed* in his life.

Unless the drunkard become habitually sober, and the churl learn to be liberal; unless the contentious man learn meekness, and the proud humility; unless every man break off, and set himself to oppose and mortify his consitutional and customary iniquity; there is no real repentance. The man's mind is not changed respecting sin: he does not sincerely grieve that ever he committed it, nor really desire it undone, nor heartily abhor it, nor is willing to be finally divorced from it; not from his darling indulgence, his Delilah, his Herodias; however he be affected, alarmed, and restrained.

I allow, that the true penitent will find work enough all his life with his own peculiar evil propensities; and after all his watchfulness, prayer, and determination of mind against every sin, he will too often manifest, to his great sorrow, that his evil nature is not destroyed, that sin yet dwells within him: but he will also give abundant evidence that no sin hath dominion over him; that his own iniquity is peculiarly abhorred, dreaded and opposed; and that, in short, "he is a new creature, old things are past away, behold all things are become new." This will not be so evident to others, in the case of a man, who was before moral and decent in his character; but it will be equally manifest to his own conscience; whilst he observes that he now acts from other principles, to other ends, and by another rule, than heretofore: and now he has not only regard to those things with which men are acquainted, but with equal care and attention abstains from secret sins, from evil tempers, intentions and imaginations, which are manifest only unto God.

It appears then, that this necessary repentance is a very arduous business. Thus our Lord represents it: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Do you object the profit and pleasantness of your sins, and the pain of parting with them? He answers, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out: if thy right hand or foot offend thee, cut it off. For it is profitable for thee" thus maimed and mutilated, "to enter into life, rather than having two eyes, two hands, two feet, to be cast into hell, where *their* worm never dieth, and the fire is not quenched." When the difficulty is objected, the necessity is urged; the awful alternative—repentance, or eternal damnation! But should any urge the impossibility, he proposes the effectual assistance of Him, to whom all things are possible. An easy slothful religion may serve a man to live with; but only a diligent, self-denying religion will comfortably prepare a man to meet death. "Except a man deny himself, take up his cross daily, and forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple," saith the loving Saviour of the world, the Judge of the living and of the dead; and because we are so backward to believe it, and so much depends upon believing it, he confirms it with a double asseveration;—"Verily, verily, I say unto you."

But though the work is great, and requires labour and self-denial, there is no cause for despondency: the encouragements are proportionable: the success certain to every one who is in good earnest about it: and the work itself unspeakably more pleasant than all the forbidden delights of sin.

PART THIRD.

Encouragements to Repentance.

I HAVE already intimated, that he who, convinced of the necessity of repentance, in good earnest uses those means which God hath appointed in order to it, may depend upon the effectual assistance of the Holy Spirit in this

Digitized by Google

important undertaking, which will render it both practicable and pleasant: and the same topic will afterwards be resumed, when those means are treated of. I shall not therefore farther speak upon that subject in this place, but lead your attention to those encouragements which arise from the assurance that repentance is inseparably connected with salvation.

I. In the *first* place, "God commandeth all men every where to repent." Were there any of the human race who did not need repentance, or any to whom repentance would be unavailing, we may be sure God would not have given such a commandment. He sends no message of this kind to fallen angels, or to the souls of wicked men who have died in their sins; because he hath determined to show them no mercy. Having done wrong in sinning, doubtless they continue to do wrong in not repenting; and their impenitent rebellion and enmity to God will eternally illustrate his justice in their condemnation; as all will see, that he doth not without cause treat them as enemies. A man who hath murdered his lawful prince, though the law must have its course, ought to repent, and shows a still more desperate spirit of rebellion if he die vindicating his conduct. Yet the avenger of blood, designing no mercy, requires no submission. A command to submit and repent, if sent to a company of condemned criminals, would directly excite a beam of hope in every relenting breast.—God sends his ministers and his word, commanding thee O sinner, to repent; were no more said, thou mightest safely draw this conclusion:—"Certainly he hath thoughts of peace, and intends to shew mercy to all who obey the summons."

II. God is always in Scripture represented as peculiarly ready to receive and entertain repenting sinners: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD." Jer. xxxi. 18—20. Here is the true penitent, mourning for sin, covered with shame, and crying for mercy: and the encouraging answer of that God, "who waited to be gracious." The same is most emphatically inculcated by the experience of David in the thirty-second Psalm. In this, mark carefully how soon the sweet sense of forgiving love followed his ingenious confession of guilt.

But omitting many other Scriptures, for the sake of brevity, let me detain you a little in meditating on the prodigal son; a parable spoken on purpose to encourage the publicans and sinners, who listened to the words of Jesus. Let us attentively consider the character of the prodigal, his disdainful and ungrateful behaviour to a wise and indulgent father, his debauched and dissolute life, and the misery to which he was reduced. Here, as in a glass, we may see ourselves; our pride and ingratitude, our contempt of God and wilful departure from him, our folly, and our misery whilst we live in sin. Then let us view him at length *come to himself*, conscious of his guilt, sinking under his misery, covered with shame, adopting the resolution of returning to his offended father, with penitent confessions, and humble supplications. Discouraged as well as humbled, by the recollection of his own vileness, his only hope arises from meditating on the kindness of him whom he had so basely offended; and he can just enough raise his mind above despondency to expect, that, perhaps, after many repulses, and reiterated submissions and entreaties, answered by deserved upbraidings, his father might be at length prevailed on to admit him, in some mean capacity, to share that plenty which his servants enjoyed. Here we have the frame of spirit, the hopes, and the fears of the true penitent, most affectingly delineated. But, behold the tender father is looking out with eager expectation, for the return of his lost prodigal! he sees him afar off, and, through parental tenderness and com-

Digitized by Google

passion, is regardless of his age and gravity, and runs to meet him. Finding that he abhorred and condemned himself, without one reproach or the least delay, he welcomes him as a son: he clothes, he feasts, and rejoices over him, and commands all his servants to rejoice with him: "Because," says he, "this my son was dead, and is alive! was lost, and is found!"

Thus shall every true penitent be welcomed by a gracious God. Not only shall he meet with a kinder reception than his fears foreboded; but his most sanguine expectations shall be far exceeded; his sins, however numerous, shall not be mentioned against him; his wants shall be all supplied: pardon, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost shall be conferred on him; the robe of righteousness and salvation shall clothe him; angels in heaven shall rejoice more over him, than over ninety and nine Pharisees, who in their own judgement need no repentance; yea, God himself shall acknowledge him as his own child, and rejoice over him to do him good! Arise then, poor dejected sinner, and imitate this prodigal.

III. We have seen, that repentance and forgiveness are connected, in a great many texts of Scripture which have been cited, and many others might be produced. But I would more especially call your attention to those encouraging promises, which are expressly confined to such as are exercising repentance. It would be a needless prolixity to enumerate the whole, or the most of these promises! a few examples may suffice: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word." Is. lvii. 15. lxvi. 2. "He looketh upon men, and if any say I have sinned, I have perverted that which is *right*, and it profiteth me not; he shall deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light." Job xxxiii. 27, 28. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy." Prov. xxviii. 13. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John i. 9. Let but the broken-hearted sinner well consider these few citations, and plead them in prayer, through the intercession of Jesus, and he will find them full of consolation. Then let him search the Scriptures, and he will observe, that no one character is so particularly encouraged as that of the penitent, under the titles of mourners, poor in spirit, contrite, humble, and such others, as are included in the explanation which has been given of true repentance. These things abundantly prove, that none but true penitents share the blessings, or are entitled to the consolations which flow from the salvation of the gospel; and that no degree of aggravated guilt can exclude any repenting sinner from the participation of the one, and the enjoyment of the other.

But let not any from hence conclude, that these privileges are properly the *rewards* of repentance, or that it *atones* for our crimes. This would supersede the necessity of the expiatory sufferings of Jesus, and militate with St Paul's express declaration, "that we are justified by *faith*, through the righteousness of Christ," and consequently would infer, "that Christ died in vain." Did we repent of ourselves, without the preventing and assisting grace of God; and were our repentance perfect in its nature and fruits, it could not avail for our justification in any degree. It is indeed observable, that even they who speak of atoning for our transgressions of the divine law by repentance, change their language when they have occasion to treat of the laws of human governments: you seldom hear them speak of a traitor or murderer making atonement for his crimes by *repentance*, but by *his death*. This sacrifice to justice the law demands: this alone expiates the offence: and if a criminal, however penitent or disposed to future obedience, escape punishment; the law is dispensed with, justice is relaxed, and no atonement

Digitized by Google

made. But God's justice is perfect, and can admit of no relaxation: his law must be magnified and made honourable, and cannot be dispensed with. Not the repentance, but the eternal punishment of the offender, is the atonement indispensibly insisted upon, or one equally honourable to the precept and sanction of the divine law. This the true penitent perceives or allows; he subscribes the sentence of his own condemnation, and humbly trusts in that vicarious atonement, which the Son of God once made, and which is of infinite value and efficacy; and through which "God is JUST, and the justifier of the believer." That repentance which is depended on for justification, is a proud unbelieving repentance, and not the humble repentance here treated of.

But in fact, repentance, where it is genuine, is the gift of God. Thus St Paul speaks on this subject to his beloved Timothy. "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. if God peradventure will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. In like manner the apostle Peter, before the Jewish rulers, declared, concerning Jesus, whom they had crucified: "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins." And when the same apostle gave his brethren and the church at Jerusalem an account of the conversion of Cornelius and his household, they "glorified God, saying, Then hath God to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Acts v. 31. xi. 28.

This accords to the prediction or promise which JEHOVAH gave by the prophet Zechariah,—"I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." Zech. xii. 10. This was fulfilled in part, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the crucifiers of Christ, on the day of Pentecost, and when, being pricked to the heart, and inquiring of the apostles "what they must do;" three thousand obeyed the call to "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." In entire harmony with these decisive testimonies of holy writ, are those petitions in our excellent liturgy, which, alas! are often so familiar to the ear, as scarcely to excite the attention of the understanding, and not at all to affect the heart, of many professed worshippers in the established church: "Let us beseech him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit." "That it may please thee to give us true repentance." "Create and make in us new and contrite hearts;" with expressions implying the same important truth, which continually occur in many parts of our truly scriptural liturgy.

In fact, though we have so much cause for repentance, and *are in duty* bound to repent; yet our proud carnal hearts are naturally destitute of the least disposition or inclination to this duty. The shame therefore of our obstinate impenitency belongs to us; but the whole glory of our repentance, when the grace of God disposes and enables us to repent, is due to him, "who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure." So far then are we from *meriting* any thing by repenting, that we are laid under fresh obligations to him "who hath granted us repentance unto life." "Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Yet, on the other hand, let us not regard those who represent our natural want of inclination as an excuse for impenitency; not considering that the dominion of pride, and the love of sin, in the heart, which renders us incapable of our duty, forms itself the very essence of that impenitent heart, which God abhors and will condemn, and which cannot be its own excuse. Nor is the most penitent person in the world perfect in his repentance. No man hates sin in a degree equal to its hatefulness: no man condemns, abases, and abhors himself, as much as he ought to do; or as much as he would, did he more perfectly behold the glory of God, the excellency of the law, the evil of sin, and the mul-

Digitized by Google

titude of his own transgressions; or had he more fixed views of the nature and glory of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. He that is habitually most penitent, finds his repentance capable of increase when his views are enlarged, and his heart is peculiarly affected with these discoveries: but even in these seasons, his enlarged godly sorrow is little in comparison to what it ought to be, and would be, did he, instead of "seeing through a glass darkly, see face to face." How far then doth the general frame of his spirit, when his mind is comparatively dark and unaffected, come short of the perfection of repentance! Over this every sincere Christian mourns, and for this seeks forgiveness.

For similar reasons the *fruits* of repentance do nothing towards atoning for our sins, meriting a reward, or justifying us before God. Take a familiar illustration: You owe your tradesman a sum of money; and you now continue to deal with him for ready money only: yet the old debt is not by this diminished. But should you daily purchase to the value of a crown: and only pay daily one shilling, your debt would rapidly increase.—Perfect obedience is no more than what is due to our Creator: so that after we have by sin for years run in arrear with him, did we obey, for all the remainder of a long life, as perfectly as an arch-angel, our love and obedience would be no more than his due for the present, and could do nothing towards discharging the old account: even with the apostle Paul's obedience the debt would rapidly increase. Sure I am, whilst I now write, that I this moment am more deeply deserving of condemnation than ever; because, though I hope sincerely penitent, I daily add recent transgressions to my former sins, and shall certainly perish, if Jesus do not plead for me, "Deliver him from going down into the pit—behold the ransom."

This salvation, through the ransom and intercession of the Son of God, every true penitent cordially approves, and thankfully embraces, and shall certainly participate. My brethren, an impenitent believer and a penitent unbeliever are ideal characters, which have no existence unless in some men's imaginations: except where the repentance is counterfeit, and the faith dead. Genuine repentance and faith are twin graces produced together, thriving together, and forwarding each other's growth. It is true, some exercises of faith precede, and produce repentance in the regenerate soul: but repentance precedes, and makes way for that exercise of faith, which interests the soul in the merits of Christ for salvation. The belief of the existence and perfections of God, his law and government of our relations, obligations, and accountableness to him; of the future state, the day of judgment, heaven and hell, always precedes repentance, and is influential in leading man to it: a belief of several truths respecting Jesus Christ and his salvation, generally, though perhaps not always, precedes. But he must be already in some degree penitent, who can cordially approve and embrace that salvation; for whilst a man remains impenitent, his proud heart will have insuperable objections to it; insuperable I say, in any other way, than by that change of judgment and disposition, which is denominated repentance.

The salvation revealed in the gospel, exalts God upon the throne, and requires the sinner to submit to his authority and righteousness, and give him the whole glory of his salvation. This appears most equitable to the true penitent, and to him alone. "Let God be glorified, says he, by all in heaven and earth, whatever becomes of me; but should he mercifully save so vile and worthless a rebel, I shall be an eternal monument of the richness of his mercy, and the power of his grace." The gospel is intended to put honour upon the law: "It is holy, just, and good," says the penitent soul: "I consent unto it that it is good," and I have "deserved its awful curse for my vile transgressions: I rejoice to see this holy lay magnified, in the obedience unto death of God incarnate: I long to have it written in my heart by the finger of the Spirit: and my prayer is, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy righteous precepts!" The gospel shews sin to be exceedingly sinful, and discovers its infinite odiousness and just demerit; the true penitent, and

Digitized by Google

he alone, irreconcileably hates all sin, even that which was his most darling indulgence. The gospel abases the sinner, silences his excuses, rejects his pleas, strips him of his distinctions; and, without regard to his learning, wisdom, wealth, honour, morality, or amiable character among men, treats him as a sinner condemned to die, deserving and fitted for destruction. To this the true penitent, and he alone, cordially submits. "I loathe and abhor myself." "To me belongs shame and confusion of face," is the genuine expression of his humbled heart.

The gospel honours Christ as the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the All in all: thus he appears to the true penitent, and to none else. In his person, undertaking, righteousness, atonement, resurrection, mediatorial exaltation, offices (as King, Priest, and Prophet,) intercession, instructions, example, and Spirit of grace, he appears to the humbled sinner altogether suitable, sufficient, and precious. On every other side despair lowers: the glory of God, and the honour of the law, demand his destruction: but here hope brightens; here he sees God glorious, and sinners saved; here he sees every thing exactly suited to his wants and his desires; here he may have his sins pardoned, his corruptions subdued, his ignorance removed, grace communicated, strength renewed, and every thing bestowed freely, without money and without price, which can raise him from the brink of hell, and the borders of despair, to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. Christ appears to him "the Pearl of great price," "the Chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." "He counts all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him." To him he flees, though with trembling heart, lest he should meet with a repulse; with trembling hand he lays hold on this only hope; to him he cleaves in the midst of discouragements and delays, and answers every rising despondency with "Lord, to whom shall I go, thou hast the words of eternal life." Nothing but impenitent pride and love of sin, render men blind to the glory, deaf to the voice, or negligent to the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ: nor can any thing but a penitent sense of the evil of sin, and the misery of a sinner, reconcile the proud heart of man to this salvation.

Though repentance therefore does not in any degree merit pardon; yet it is that disposition of mind which both prepares the soul to receive it, and renders the possessor a meet object on whom a holy God may honourably bestow it: and no further obstacle remaining, divine justice being satisfied in the sufferings of the Redeemer, the point yielded by the sinner's repentance, that he did deserve to perish, and is saved by free grace; and his heart being now rendered willing to be saved in the appointed way; he shall, without all doubt or delay, have salvation, and the consolation which springs from it.

Were more encouragement needful, I might lead your attention to the many examples with which the word of God furnishes us, of sinners, who had committed the most atrocious crimes, and borne the most infamous characters, for complicated long-continued guilt, who on repentance were pardoned and saved. It will be enough to recite a few of their names: such were Manasseh; the woman who was a sinner,—a scandalous and notorious sinner: the thief on the cross; Saul the persecutor; and the very men who crucified the Prince of Life! These instances are doubtless recorded purposely for the encouragement of those, who are ready to conclude that their sins are too many and too great to be forgiven; and they form a very important proof and exemplification of our doctrine; that no degree of guilt can exclude the true penitent from forgiveness, through the blood of Christ. For although our Lord speaks of some who sin against the Holy Ghost, and shall never be forgiven; and the apostle John mentions a sin unto death, which they who have committed should not be prayed for: yet St Paul extricates us out of this difficulty, by informing us, "that it is impossible to renew them to repentance;" which forms indeed an awful warning to those who harden their hearts against conviction and live in impenitency, but

Digitized by Google

affords no exception to our doctrine, and needs give no discouragement to the penitent soul.

And now, sinners, you see the necessity of repentance, the real nature of it, and the abundant encouragement you have to repent. I would hope that from regard to your eternal welfare, you will set about it in good earnest; not only in preference to your vain amusements and dissipations, but even to your most important business and interests which are of no consequence in comparison with this "one thing needful." Arise then, and be doing, and the Lord will both assist and prosper your endeavours.

PART FOURTH.

The proper Season for Repentance.

Such persons as are but superficially acquainted with the credulity of man, and the artifice of Satan; as have taken but little notice of the workings of their own hearts, and made but little observation of what passes around them, may be apt to conclude this part of our subject needless: yet, I trust, it will be found to be of great importance, and essentially necessary to discourse concerning the proper season of repentance.

The words of the Psalmist, quoted by the Apostle, comprise what I shall urge on this head: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." The present time alone is ours: yesterday is irrecoverably gone; to-morrow we may be in eternity! Were then all of you in the prime of youth, I would endeavour to enforce on all the necessity of *early* repentance.

To such then I first address myself. Consider, *young sinner*, that custom is second nature: thy innate depravity forges the chains which hold thee in bondage, but custom rivets them upon thee. This is not mere speculation,—it is the language of inspiration. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may he, who is accustomed to do evil, learn to do well."

Repentance may be considered either as the work of divine grace in us, or as our own work by the assistance of divine grace. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." Doubtless it is always alike easy to almighty God, to change the heart and renew the sinner; yet the sinner, when thus influenced to will, and to do, may find vastly more difficulty in some cases and circumstances than he would in others. When worldly interests, cares, and projects, together with customary indulgences, have added strength to your lusts, you will find repentance vastly more arduous than at present. You will then find it vastly more difficult to "cease to do evil, and to learn to do well," to separate from the ungodly, and to habituate your appetites and passions to controul. If you now delay, and *should* hereafter repent; you will bitterly know what it is to "pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand." When to the opposition to lusts grown ungovernable by gratification, and remorse for sins which exceed calculation, bitter reflection * on the irreparable mischief which you have been doing all your life: you add what it will cost you to renounce the friendship, to withstand the persuasions and enticements, to resist the arguments, to face the scorn and bear the reproach of those comrades in iniquity, with whom you are hitherto happily unconnected: whilst perhaps your own children, trained up in wickedness, or the wife or husband of your bosom, whom you have ignorantly espoused, may be among the number of those, who are an offence unto you. Are you therefore in youth, in early youth, yea, in childhood! You are not

* Consider in this place, what has been urged, of the necessity of restitution, Part Second. He who repents early, escapes that difficulty.

Digitized by Google

too young to be sinners, both by nature and practice; evil dispositions and evil actions render repentance both needful and reasonable; and without it you must perish in your sins. Even now, therefore, I call upon you in the name of God, to repent and turn to God, and to do works meet for repentance. Listen not to your corruptions, to your companions, to the cruel murderer of souls, who would persuade you that it is soon enough yet. Millions are now in outer-darkness, who on earth intended some time to repent, but imagined they had time enough before them. Perhaps there are scarcely any who did not once think as you are now thinking, and flatter themselves as you do. Will you also trifle with the Almighty, till his patience be wearied out, and he cut you off, as he hath those who thus provoked him before you; and send you to be their companions whose example you would imitate? *

Do you imagine you shall find less difficulty, or have more resolution to break through difficulties, hereafter? Alas! your difficulties will daily both be multiplied and gather force; and you will find less and less inclination, or resolution to encounter them. Fear, shame, and conscience will make gradually more feeble resistance; restraints of education will wear off, and you will grow bolder in iniquity. Finding respite from punishment, you will grow more secure and hardened in sin, till perhaps God will give you over to incurable obstinacy.

Do you imagine that sinful pleasures can afford you more satisfaction, than is to be found in serious godliness: Poor deluded souls! I compassionate your case, whilst I abhor the blasphemous supposition. Once I thought the same; I bless God for undeceiving me, and beg of him to grant you the same mercy. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked." "Vanity and vexation" are stamped upon all created enjoyments; they consist of eager expectations; continual anxiety, disappointments, and mortifications; a few turbulent short-lived gratifications, insipid amusements, and fatiguing pursuits of pleasure. The mind of the poor deluded man who thus seeks happiness where it is not, is uneasy in waiting for the season of enjoyment; surfeited and dissatisfied even with the moment he longed for; pained at the retrospect; alarmed when he looks forward to death and judgment; and he can find no respite from anxiety, but by banishing reflection, and foregoing the noblest privilege of the rational nature. Your smiles, ye Votaries of pleasure! are hypocritical; your mirth affectation; your heart is heaviness in the midst of your loudest peals of laughter; remorse of conscience and foreboding fears often disturb even your most jovial hours, and extort the unwilling sigh; but they render solitude and reflection bitterness: whilst the least remembrance of death, or symptom of its approach, excite a horror I have felt but cannot describe.

This is earthly, ungodly pleasure, even when health, affluence, and all conceivable advantages concur to add relish to it: but when sickness seizes the poor wretch who knows no other joy; when poverty and adversity depress, and death approaches, his case is so miserable, and his anguish so intolerable, that no words can sufficiently express it.

But true religion is the source of the sweetest serenity, the most refined delight, the most exquisite enjoyment. From conscious integrity, peace with God, submission to his will, and reliance on his providential and gracious care, spring calm content with the present, and serene expectation of the future: and these form a "peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Victory over the fear of death, and a well-grounded and lively hope of eternal happiness, support the soul in adversity, and increase the enjoyment of prosperity. Contemplation on the glories of the divine character, and the wonders God hath wrought, issuing in admiring love, adoring gratitude, and fervent praises, inspires the soul, at some seasons, "with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." A life of communion with God, an uniform walk in his pleasant ways, an increasing assurance and experience of his love, fill the Christian's peaceful

* Jer. xiii.—Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! *will* thou not be made clean? When shall it *once* be?

Digitized by Google

soul with an abiding satisfaction; which nothing greatly interrupts, but the stirrings of corruption, the force of temptation, and the imperfection of his obedience. By these, at times, guilt burdens his mind, and sorrow oppresses his heart: yet even godly sorrow itself rather increases than lessens his enjoyment: and if he for a season be unhappy, it is not because he is religious, but because he is no more so. Nor is there any rational satisfaction which he doth not enjoy, with more real relish, because with more moderation, than others do: for real religion abridges us of no enjoyment, but that which is irrational, debasing, or inordinate. In short, a flash of lightning, which for a moment interrupts, and then increases the midnight gloom, bears more comparison to the cheerful genial light of the sun, than the most exquisite gratifications of sin, to those joys which the real diligent Christian experiences from day to day. "Come, taste, and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are who trust in him."

But doth Satan persuade you, that you shall have time enough hereafter? Alas! can you be the dupes of so bare-faced an artifice? You know that you have no lease of your lives, nor are sure of beholding to-morrow's light. Many as young, as healthy, as vigorous as you, are followed to the tomb. Dare you risk eternal happiness or misery on such a peradventure! Reflect, also, that your lives are in the hands of that God, whom your sins have greatly provoked, and your presumptuous impenitency still more. May he not, even at this moment, be saying, "thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee?" Hast thou not, deluded sinner, done enough already to provoke him to it? And shouldst thou slight the present warning, and rush into forbidden pleasure; seriously consider whether thou mayest not reasonably fear, lest in the midst of some daring provocation, he should "cut thee off with a stroke," and "then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

Dare you flatter yourselves with the presumption of repenting, if not before, yet on a death-bed! Alas! how many are cut off by sudden death! how many bereft of reason by the violence of disease! how many are seized with madness, incurable madness! how many, I say, perish without one cry for mercy, and eternally curse their folly, in being the dupes of such a delusion! "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." You evidently see the design of Satan in his temptation: he aims only to lull you into security, till he can plunge you into despair; and then he will insult over you. But even should you have a space given you before death, can you reasonably hope that God will then give you his grace, which you have so long refused? Are you sure you shall improve those hours? Can you at last in your own strength, when you are languishing under a violent disorder, overcome all those difficulties which you have considered as next to insurmountable, even with the assistance of divine grace, all the days of your health? Will you need any additional anguish, when your bones are full of strong pain, and nature is even sinking under the load? Can you then be sure that your repentance is real and genuine, when you have no opportunity of bringing it to a trial by the fruits which it produces? One instance indeed is recorded of a dying penitent, to shew that repentance, even in those circumstances, is neither impossible nor unavailing; and but one, to teach us that such cases are very rare. To-day, then, make sure of this important concern. "Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eye-lids: deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the snare of the fowler."

"Remember therefore your Creator in the days of your youth." Remember your obligations and relations to him, and your offences against him: remember, repent, and seek forgiveness without delay, through that Saviour who hath promised, that "they who seek him early shall find him."

But indeed this best season is already elapsed with many; and it is too late to exhort them to early repentance. Perhaps some are dolefully lamenting, "My youth hath been spent in vanity and ungodliness; yea, the prime of life is irrecoverably past, and I am growing hoary in the ways of

Digitized by Google

wickedness: what must I do? Is there nothing for me, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation? Indeed, my fellow-sinner, thy case is very deplorable: the day is almost spent: the night, wherein no man can work, is swiftly approaching: thy work is not begun; yea, all thou hast been doing, during the whole course of thy life, must be as it were undone. Thou must travel back again, with weeping and supplication, all the way which thou hast trodden for so many years. Death, judgment, and eternity, press upon thy unprepared soul: the grave is yawning for thy enfeebled body: and should death seize upon thee ere repentance hath taken place, it had been good for thee hadst thou never been born. Still, however, thy case is not desperate: though provoked by thy impenitency, the Lord yet renews his compassionate invitations. If then thy heart begin to relent; if remorse embitter thy soul: if thou art at length willing to acknowledge thy offence, and seek his face; come, and cast thyself at his feet, and venture upon his mercy and truth, who sayeth, "Him that cometh unto me I will *in no wise* cast out." If *indeed thou art renewed* to repentance, though "at the ninth or eleventh hour, thou shalt be equalled with those who have borne the heat and burden of the day." Herein lies the danger and the difficulty: but with God all things are possible; he "can change the Ethiopian's skin and the leopard's spots; and by his power, even thou who hast been long accustomed to do evil, mayest learn to do well." Admire then his long-suffering, who hath borne with thy impenitent disregard of his precepts and promises, his authority and invitations, for forty, fifty, sixty or seventy years, and has neither cut thee off by death, nor deprived thee of thy much abused reason, nor left thee to utter insensibility! This is distinguishing patience!

Methinks, aged sinner, I see thy relentings, hear thy groans, and witness thy tears, confusion, and despondency; whilst the crimes of a long life pass in review before thee, the sword of divine justice is brandished against thee, conscience reproaches, and Satan insinuates that it is now too late. Yea, thou art even inclined once more to listen to his insinuations; and to conclude that there is no hope, and that after such a life, thy late repentance and worthless services will never meet with acceptance. But reject this dishonourable thought, resist the lying tempter; when he persuaded thee, heretofore, that it was too early in life to repent, he led thee to the brink of an awful precipice: if he prevail in persuading thee it is now too late, he pushes thee headlong into everlasting ruin. In both he acts in character, "a liar and a murderer from the beginning."

"God's ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts," and "his mercies are higher than the heavens," else the case of the aged sinner would be desperate. But though he will not accept the late repentance, and the feeble obedience of one hour, because they merit such a favour; yet for his own name's sake, and through the atonement and intercession of Jesus, he will pardon, justify, and save all those who truly repent and believe the gospel. This discovery of the unspeakable riches of divine love, whilst it gives encouragement to the drooping heart, ought to increase the sinner's remorse for having so neglected and provoked a God of such excellency and mercy, and to quicken his diligence in availing himself of the divine patience, by fleeing for refuge to the hope still set before him. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice," before to-morrow, embrace his proffered mercy, and harden not your hearts. And whatever stage of human life you are now arrived at, I can only inculcate the same exhortation: "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation;" and suggest the same petition: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Psalm xc. 12. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it" speedily, and "with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Eccles. ix. 10. I have shown you, that this, of all others, is the most necessary and important work you can find to do: make then no delay, lest "he swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest."

Digitized by Google

PART FIFTH.

The Means of Repentance.

In entering on this part of our subject, a formidable objection may be started, and even grounded on what hath already been discoursed, against treating upon the means of repentance at all. It hath been observed, that repentance is the gift of God to us, the purchase of Christ for us, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us: "How then," it will be objected, "can we do any thing towards it? If it please God to bestow it upon us, we shall repent, without difficulty or labour: if not, our labour will be altogether to no purpose." It is indeed a certain truth, that repentance is the gift of God, as it has been proved from plain Scriptural testimonies: but it is equally true, and capable of the same proof, that we must diligently labour for it. Nor is there any inconsistency betwixt these distinct views of the subject: they only appear inconsistent to our dark and narrow apprehensions. Upon a similar occasion, the Truth, the Word, and the Wisdom of God saith, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give you." John vi. 27. Christ will give it most freely, but you must labour for it most diligently. Thus the harvest is the gift of God, who giveth seed to the sower; who giveth rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and causeth the earth to yeild her increase; yet must the husbandman labour. In both temporal and spiritual concerns, God gives not to the slothful, but to the diligent; and his bounty does not supersede, but encourage our activity.

He works in us, that we may work out our own salvation; he hath appointed means, and commanded us to use them. Obedience is our duty. We ought to use the means, and trust in the Lord to render them effectual; but not to depend on them, or rest in them. They who seriously desire to repent and turn to God, will manifest their sincerity by thus using every proper means with diligence and perseverance: nor shall their labour be in vain; "for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But negligence will detect hypocrites, and justify God in their condemnation. Something then must be done in order to our being made partakers of repentance: not under the notion of merit, as if we made the purchase: for it is the gift of God: not under the notion of efficacious operation; for it is the work of divine grace: but in order to evidence our integrity in purposing repentance; and that we may be found waiting upon God in the way of his appointment. And though the means will not affect the end without efficacious grace; yet they are quite as much calculated to produce the effect, as medicines are to remove sickness, or agriculture to procure the crop,—both of which are rendered effectual only by the divine blessing.

1. Then, "Consider your ways" as David did: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet into thy testimonies." Psalm cxix. 59. Are you now desirous truly to repent? Retire frequently into your chamber, shun the hurry and dissipation of a crowd, and court solitude, that you may recollect yourselves, and seriously commune with your own heart. There minutely review your whole past life: with exactness survey your thoughts, words, and actions, ever since the dawn of reason, or from the beginning of recollection. Ask yourselves seriously such questions as these: What have you been scheming, intending, pursuing, all your days? What hath been the standard of your judgment, and rule of your conduct: the opinion of men, or the word of God: the fashions of the world, or the example of Christ? What have your affections been fixed on? Have you given God, or the world,

Digitized by Google

your heart: I mean your warmest desires, and most devoted attachment? Have you intentionally been pleasing God, or yourselves? Have you been seeking his glory in every thing; or your own ease, interest, gratification, and honour? In what have your time and money been most cheerfully expended? In works of piety and charity; or in gratifying your sensuality, pride, and ambition: Have you been laying up, or aiming to lay up, treasures in heaven, or on earth? Have you improved health, prosperity, abilities, and influence, in promoting the glory of God, the interests of piety, and the good of men? Or have you done no good, but mischief, with them? Hath God been the delightful subject of your meditations and conversation: or have you willingly and habitually forgotten him, and regarded religious thoughts and converse as insipid and irksome? Hath the sweet work of prayer and praise, the worship of God, and hearing and reading his word, been your pleasure, or your task? Have you been out of your element when thus employed, and found more charms, and experienced more satisfaction in licentious company or dissipated mirth? Have you habitually reverenced the sacred name of God, hallowed his Sabbaths, and frequented his sanctuary with reverence and devotion? Or have you taken his name in vain,* despised his ordinances, polluted his Sabbaths, or mocked him with an hypocritical worship?

What have your imaginations been? pure and heavenly, or lewd, ambitious, envious, covetous, revengeful, and abominable? What has your discourse been? edifying, serious, and candid; or profane, polluted, trifling, slanderous, and dissembling? What have your tempers been? meek, peaceable, and kind; or turbulent, contentious and overbearing? Have you behaved, as the word of God directs, in relative life, as parents, children, husbands, wives, masters, and servants? Has equity, disinterestedness, and kindness; or selfishness, covetousness and fraud, directed your worldly business? Have you in sobriety, chastity, and temperance, governed your appetites and passions?

But I have already exceeded due bounds in this specimen of queries, which you ought with all impartiality to propose to yourselves; allowing conscience, after mature recollection, to return a faithful answer. In short, set the law of God and the example of Christ before your eyes; make diligent search into your secret practices, intentions, and inclinations; steadily view your likeness, and estimate your character in this manner, until you know what manner of persons you are. Shrink not back from that view of self-deformity which will thus be presented to you; but look, and look again, till you "abhor yourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."

The man whose circumstances are embarrassed, may possibly retrieve all, if he have resolution in time to look well into his affairs, and be made sensible how bad they are: but to shrink from this investigation, and to banish reflection on a disagreeable subject, completes many a man's ruin. Thus multitudes are afraid, or averse, fully to examine their own character, conduct, and state; they flee from reflection, because uneasy and mortifying; and huddle up all in an unexamined obscurity, till they rush blindfold into remediless ruin. But by carefully examining how matters stand betwixt God

* By taking the name of God in vain, I do not mean, nor does the Bible mean, merely blasphemy, perjury, and profane swearing; but every jest or expression which implies want of reverence to the name of God, his word and sacred things. Almost in all companies, the conversation, even though trifling and polluting, is incessantly interlarded with the words *God*, *Lord*, *Christ*, and such like: which are formed into hackneyed phrases, and used as mere expletives to adorn a period, or as notes of admiration, approbation, or indignation. Nothing can more fully discover the degree in which sinful man despises the glorious God, than this general and almost universal practice. Without pleasure, profit, or apparent temptation, in violation of an express command, and in defiance of an awful threatening; that tremendous name which impresses angels with holy awe, and at which devils tremble, is made man's mere by-word. But when the affronted *Jehovah* shall at last address the sinner, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?" and he finds that God will "not hold him guiltless;" his profane trifling will be at an end; and he will be constrained to tremble at the name which he would not reverence.—The inefficacy of much apparent religion, and the worthlessness of much evangelical profession, are demonstrated by their failing to repress this awful profaneness. All true Christians, who worship God in spirit and in truth, are, by that profound veneration which they bear to the Lord, cured effectually of this practice; and they ought to unite in bearing testimony against it, boldly, in all companies.

Digitized by Google

and our souls, the danger is discovered, the remedy is at hand, and our destruction happily prevented. Shift not then this business; slur it not over, but go through with it, though disagreeable and mortifying; and you will find yourselves amply recompensed, not only by its subserviency to repentance, but to future solid and abiding peace of conscience.

II. Examine your heart and life daily. Nor only say, "What have I done?" but "What am I now doing?" "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" And the Lord pronounces him a fool who trusteth in his own heart. Men retain their good opinion and confidence concerning themselves, because they remain strangers to their own hearts, for want of daily examination: for the only way to discover a concealed villain, is carefully to watch him. Watch then your own hearts: examine well your own lives; keep before your eyes the requirements of the divine law, as far as known: search the Scriptures daily for further information: review your daily conduct, judging of it by that infallible standard: descend to particulars: to omissions and commissions, words and actions, intentions and imaginations, deficiencies and defilements in duty, and backwardness to it. This will prove of vast importance to self-knowledge, and consequently to self-abasement. Though difficult at first, it will soon become natural and pleasant to the true Christian; it will continually keep the heart humble and watchful, and the conscience tender; and dependence on the mercy of God, through the blood of Christ, for pardon, in continual exercise. This conduct, like well arranged accounts, will prevent a thousand anxieties and terrors, in times of danger and sickness, and at the hour of death. Grudge not, then, this labour, if you are ambitious to be called disciples of Jesus, and do not "judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life."

III. Meditate frequently upon such subjects, as tend to excite and increase in the heart, the sense of the heinousness of sin; labouring with your reluctant minds to bring and keep them close to this exercise. Impenitency is greatly the effect of extenuating notions of the malignity of sin; repentance must then flow from a sense of its hatefulness. It is needless to enumerate the various subjects which, duly meditated upon, may have this effect; and it would lead us into repetitions. Such are the majesty and excellency, authority and law, threatenings and judgments of God: his righteous severity against sinning angels, against Adam and his whole posterity, against the inhabitants of the old world, against Sodom and Gomorrah, against the nations of Canaan, against the people of Israel, in a variety of instances, especially in the final destruction of Jerusalem, and the continued dispersion of the Jewish nation.—All these, and others too numerous for me to mention, are but forerunners and emblems of that everlasting destruction, with which in a future state all they shall be punished, "who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Now, we know that the judgment of God is according unto truth:" these awful instances of his tremendous justice show us his judgment of the evil of sin, and what it really deserves: even *his judgment*, who is LOVE, and "delighteth not in the death of a sinner;" but punishes solely to express his holy hatred of that abominable thing which we lodge in our bosom, and in behalf of which we plead. These things were written on purpose to lead us to judge concerning sin, as God judgeth; and this will surely lead us to unfeigned repentance.

IV. Meditate frequently and intensely on the death of Christ. Consider who he was, and what he suffered, and wherefore he suffered. Purposely retire to contemplate this surprising scene; and yield not to weariness or indisposition, till you arrive at some heart-affecting views of a crucified Saviour. Superficial speculations may amuse the fancy, and furnish our conversation; but without deeply examining and well digesting this subject, and being thus established in judgment concerning it, we can never, in habitual experience, reconcile godly sorrow, with abiding peace and joy in the Lord, or humble repentance, with a lively hope of everlasting life. Here that Christian, who turns his eyes from other objects that he may stedfastly

Digitized by Google

look unto Jesus, * will perceive, that the awful vengeance of God against sin, before considered, proceeds not from want of love to the persons of sinners, but from abhorrence of moral evil—the effect of a perfect view of its infinite malignity: that this judgment and conduct are essential to the most perfect character, and requisite to his glory as moral Governor of the universe. When, therefore, in boundless love, he determined the salvation of sinners, he would "not spare his own Son;" but would sooner deliver him, "in whom his soul delighted," to the most intense agonies and ignominious death, than leave sin unpunished, or permit his intelligent creatures to remain ignorant of his infinite hatred of it. For the instruction of the whole universe to eternal ages, in these and other important truths, respecting the divine character, law, and government, did the Son of God "suffer once for sins, the just for the unjust."

Here likewise the sinner may learn to estimate the worth of his immortal soul; the vanity of this world; the dangerous situation in which he is placed; the difficulty there is in a sinner's salvation, which cost him, who created and upholds all things by his powerful word, such humiliation and sufferings; the unspeakable love of God, and his willingness to save sinners; seeing "he hath not withheld his only Son from us." These are lessons eminently conducive to repentance; and which can in no other way be learned to such advantage, as by "looking unto Jesus," and meditating on his sufferings. He, then, who sincerely would repent, must daily retire in contemplation to Gethsemane and Golgotha.

V. *Lastly*, The whole must be rendered effectual by fervent and importunate prayer, without which all other means would be in vain. Whether we read, or meditate, or examine our lives and hearts, or whatever we do, prayer must accompany all; for it is God who takes away the heart of stone, and gives the heart of flesh, and renews us unto repentance; and him we must earnestly supplicate to bestow on us this good and perfect gift. But alas! it is extremely difficult to prevail upon men to get alone, and on their bended knees, day by day, to beseech the Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, to work this change in them, and bestow this gift on them. To read, to hear sermons, and other things of a public nature, men may be more easily induced. A mere form or task of devotion, may also be reconciled with a self-sufficient and worldly spirit and conduct: but real prayer stands in direct opposition to them all. It is the very language of indigence and dependence, and earnest longings after God and holiness. In order to pray aright, a man must know, in some measure, how vast and various his wants are; he must understand his true interest and happiness; he must supremely value the favour and image of God. No man can truly pray for spiritual blessings, who doth not carefully review his life, explore his heart, and in a measure know his own character; who is not in some degree acquainted with the majesty, holiness, and heart-searching knowledge of God, his own absolute dependence upon him, his relations and obligations to him, and his offences committed against him; and who is not, in a general way at least, instructed in the way of access for sinners to an offended God, through the atoning blood of his Son, and humbly willing to approach in this appointed way. Such a man draws near with reverential fear and deep self-abasement, confessing his unworthiness, and imploring forgiveness; encouraged only by believing apprehensions of the rich mercy of God to sinners through the mediation of Jesus. Conscious also of ignorance, weakness and depravity, in humble sincerity and earnest longings, he pleads the promises of the word of God, and implores the teaching, strengthening, sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Faith, repentance, and universal holiness, he longs for, feels his want of, expects, and seeks daily from God in prayer. In all this, his words express, but not fully, the very meaning of his heart. Daily he thus opens and pours out his soul unto God, turning the precepts and promises which he reads or

* Heb. xii. 2. ἀφορῶντες.

Digitized by Google

hears from the word of God, into fervent petitions. All his sorrows, anxieties, and perplexities he spreads before the Lord, seeking, in every exigence, support, direction, and consolation from him: subjoining continual thanksgivings for mercies received, and intercessions for all around him; and submissively referring himself, in every case, to the will and wisdom of his heavenly Father. "Thus is he careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, makes his requests known unto God;" "and casts his care upon him, who careth for him." Such prayer as this cannot be taught by man, but must be the effect of "the pouring out of the Spirit of grace and supplication;" who, communicating divine light to the understanding, and holy dispositions to the heart, excites fervent and spiritual desires in the soul, and teacheth us to pray with "groanings that cannot be uttered." It is therefore called in the word of God, "praying, in and by the Spirit;" as opposed to a "form of godliness," or good words spoken with the mouth, without suitable affections and desires in the heart.* He whose words express more than *he* intends, or heartily desires, prays *formally* and hypocritically: he who means all his words express, and more than he can find words to express, evidently prays spiritually, and, though he may not be sensible of it, is assisted in prayer by the Holy Spirit.†

But if nothing, however specious or ostentatious, be prayer, which has not in it something of this nature, (as I trust, upon mature examination of the Scriptures, will be found the case:) then evidently the proud, ungodly, and carnal-minded, cannot pray aright. Nor can it be deemed strange, if, when a sinner is *first* seriously impressed with concern for his soul, he hath great reluctance to this spiritual exercise, and knows not how to go about it. For even real Christians, who are arrived at some measure of stability, and have made considerable proficiency in a life of communion with God, meet with considerable difficulty in this grand concern; have need habitually to be humbled for neglects and imperfections; and want continually fresh supplies of divine assistance to excite, teach, and enable them thus to "pray always and not faint."

Satan also will oppose to the uttermost all his artifices to prevent a sinner's approaching to the throne of grace; well knowing, that in the critical season, when any person is under serious impressions, if he can be prevailed on to neglect prayer, they will soon wear off, and leave the conscience more insensible than before. The business, pleasures, diversions, and society of the world; and that scorn with which ungodly men treat a life of prayer, combine their influence in aid of natural corruption and Satan's temptation, to keep the poor convinced sinner from the throne of grace. And as if these hindrances were not sufficient, even some, professing serious godliness, (whose intention may be better than their judgment,) extremely increase the difficulty, by strenuously contending, that unconverted persons ought not to pray, or be exhorted to it. ‡

* Saul, previous to conversion, was a strict Pharisee, who made *long prayers*; yet when the Lord spoke of his conversion to Ananias, he said, with emphasis, "Behold, he prayeth." Before, he might read or repeat long forms, or pray fluently in extemporaneous language: but now he feels his indigence, dependence, and unworthiness, and really prays with suitable desires and dispositions.

† I am far from thinking that no prayer is accepted, which comes not up to this description; but this is the *nature* of a sinner's praying for spiritual blessings: to this, in a degree proportioned to the measure of his grace, a believer attains: and every accepted prayer has something in it of the same nature.

‡ If a man ought not to pray before conversion, he ought to *know*, that is, *be sure*, of his conversion before he prays: for if he be not sure of his conversion he cannot be sure whether he may, and ought to pray, or not. Thus *assurance* springs up in a sinner's heart all at once; and now having received he may ask; having found he may begin to seek: the door being opened he may begin to knock.—Surely, at first glance, every one must see this to be absurd and unscriptural, yea, anti-scriptural. Truly all ought to pray, but none will in sincerity, until the Holy Spirit in some degree inclines the heart. Then a man feels an inclination to do that, which before was his duty, though he did it not: frequently he knows not from whence this change proceeds: but is encouraged, by such Scriptures as that before alluded to, (Matth. vii. 7, 8. or Isaiah lv. 6, 7.) "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way." Thus he begins to ask and seek: and in consequence to receive and find: in this way giving diligence he makes his calling and election sure; and this statement reconciles all the different views which the Scripture gives us of this matter. The Lord seeking us when lost, and being found of us when we sought him not, inclines us, (though we are not aware whence this inclination comes) to seek him in prayer; and thus we receive all spiritual and eternal blessings in the way of asking and receiving.

Digitized by Google

Such indeed are the pride and ungodliness of man, that, left to himself, and under Satan's influence, he never *will* pray in sincerity. Confounding the depraved disinclination with a real want of ability, many thence argue the want of obligation. But this argument, if it prove any thing, proves too much; and would consequently repeal the law and abrogate the gospel, and furnish the devil himself with an apology, by making inward depravity a justification of outward rebellion; the desperate wickedness of the life. For certain it is, that man is as much disinclined to keep the whole law, or to repent and believe the gospel, as he is to pray; and will never do either the one or the other, if left to himself, destitute of the influence of divine grace. But doth this indeed justify all our transgressions of the law, and contempt of the gospel?

Again, prayer is an important part of that worship and obedience which the law requires: and it is also the grand means of receiving from Jesus new covenant-blessings. He, then, who prays not, at once breaks the law, and contemns the gospel: "and he that keeps the whole law, and *thus** offends in one point, is guilty of all."† If then a sinner ought not to pray, he is justifiable in breaking the whole law, and equally justifiable in neglecting the salvation of the gospel! In fact, however, our depraved inclinations are in no respect the measure of our duty, but the direct opposite. "The carnal mind is enmity to God; is not subject to *the law of* God, nor indeed *can* be." The law to which the carnal mind *cannot* be subject, is the measure of our duty. This men *cannot* obey, because of the depravity of their nature, which enhances, instead of extenuating, their guilt. Men ought to love God and one another; having sinned, they ought to repent: they ought to believe and pray, to deny themselves and mortify their lusts: but they do not. What is the reason? They cannot. But in what sense is this true? In fact, because they dislike the service of God, hate his law, reject his authority despise his gospel, and prefer the gratification of their lusts; and because these hateful dispositions are so predominant in them, that without the interposition of Omnipotence they are insuperable. Can these hateful dispositions then, be seriously urged as an excuse: Will any dare to urge them at the day of judgment? No; "every mouth will then be stopped, and all the world shall be found guilty before God." I should not in this place have touched upon this controversial subject, had I not observed how greedily this poison is drunk down, and how fatally it operates, in stupifying the conscience, flattering the pride, and apologizing for the sloth of mankind.

Instead of thus abetting, we should endeavour to counteract these artifices of Satan, and to combat the reluctancy of a sinner's heart, by shewing the absolute necessity of prayer unto salvation; enforcing the invitations to the throne of grace; expatiating on the promises made to all who call upon the Lord; explaining the nature of prayer; directing him in the new and living Way to the throne of grace; answering objections, obviating discouragements, representing prayer as *our* privilege, and unspeakable consolation; and exhorting sinners to draw near, and share our happiness; for we may be assured, that they who are thus excited to pray, will in due time render unto God the praise of "making them to differ."

But I return from this digression. My fellow-sinners, you must pray or perish.—Your backwardness to pray should humble you, and stir you up to overcome it; especially by crying unto the Lord to incline your heart, by his grace, to love and delight in prayer. Your ignorance should urge you to begin as the disciples did:—"Lord, teach us to pray." You must not yield to corruption, temptation, or discouragement, but persevere in prayer with all sincerity and earnestness. If you pray aright, you will be very far from trusting in, or boasting of your prayers; for you will perceive much imperfection and defilement in them. But though humbled on that account,

* Num. xv. 30, 31. "The soul that doeth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord—he hath despised the word of the Lord."

† James ii. 10, 11.

Digitized by Google

you need not despond; your prayers, though broken, faltering, and feeble, (if you mean what you express, and desire what you ask,) shall meet with acceptance through the intercession of Jesus, and be not only answered, but in due season far exceeded. Especially in this way you must seek repentance, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ; using the other means with diligence, earnestness, and perseverance; and then you will assuredly be made partaker of "that repentance which is unto salvation, not to be repented of."

CONCLUSION.

HAVING thus gone through the subject, according to the method first laid down, nothing remains but to close with a few practical observations.

I. I would observe, from what has been discoursed, that every species of religion, in which repentance forms no prominent part from first to last, is justly to be suspected, yea, certainly to be condemned as unscriptural and destructive. There is a great deal of this religion in the world, which often comes recommended by extraordinary zeal for some peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and is distinguished by unwarranted confidence and high affections. Men hearing the gospel, are superficially alarmed on account of their sins, and eagerly look out for comfort. Through inexperience they lie open to Satan's artifice, and are easily imposed on with false comfort, deduced from false principles, exactly suited to their carnal unhumbled hearts. Thus they presume that their sins are pardoned, and their state good; and with this presumption self-love is delighted, and high affections produced: these, expressed in earnest fluent language, create them injudicious admirers: this flatters and affects them the more, and confirms them in their confidence; so that they think, after such experiences, they must never more, on any account, doubt of their own salvation. Yet all this is only a land-flood, and soon subsides. They gradually experience a decay of affection, and grow lifeless, indolent, and worldly; with their affection their confidence declines, but they struggle hard to exclude doubtings: they call themselves backsliders; allow themselves to have forsaken their first love; and groan out Job's complaint, though not at all in Job's meaning: "Oh that it were with me as in months past!" And would a wish suffice, something might be done: but they have no heart for greater exertion. To close all, they abuse the doctrine of final perseverance; take it for granted that they are saints; expect to be restored as it were by miracle, whilst they turn a deaf ear to the voice of Christ, commanding them to "be zealous, and repent;" till at length, perhaps, a suitable occasion and temptation presenting, they throw aside their profession of godliness.

This is exactly the religion of the stony-ground hearers, who had faith, confidence, and joy, such as they were, but no repentance or humility,* and therefore no root in themselves: for it is only by renewing our hearts unto repentance, that the ground is prepared for the reception of the seed, and the production of true faith and holiness, as hath already been demonstrated.

"Let no man deceive you by vain words." Except you are partakers of repentance, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, all your religion is vain, your hopes presumptuous, and your destruction inevitable; whatever other attainments, gifts, or experiences, you may have to boast of, or to buoy

* It is very observable how often the words, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," are repeated by our Saviour; and how many similar expressions are used by his apostles. This infallibly teaches us, that all appearances of religion are fallacious, so long as the heart remains unhumbled.

Digitized by Google

up your confidence. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and as effectually ruin souls by false religion, as by open ungodliness; and far more unsuspectedly.

II. I observe from what hath been discoursed, that great care is requisite in distinguishing betwixt true repentance, and that which is superficial and merely natural.* This is of vast importance, as numbers of those who die impenitent, have at times judged themselves, and been thought by others to be penitent. Let it then be remembered that true repentance, though generally accompanied with terror, tears, confessions, and outward reformation, good words, fair promises, and earnest resolutions, doth not consist in, or uniformly attend upon all or any of them. But true repentance is a change of judgment, inclination, and affection, in respect to sin, immediately: accompanied, preceded, or followed by a change of judgment, inclination, and affection, respecting God and his law, Christ and his gospel, ourselves and our conduct, this world and the next. From this change springs sorrow for sin, self-abasement and condemnation; sole dependence on God's mercy; supreme valuation of Jesus and his salvation; love to God and holiness; tenderness of conscience; zeal for good works; all holy tempers; holy conversation, and holy conduct; accompanied with continual humiliation for remaining imperfections and defilements. Where these effects have been evidently produced, though with little or no terror, no effusions of tears, or seasons of peculiar melting, but gradually and silently, the repentance is yet sincere and genuine, by this rule,—it leads to Christ and holiness. But all other appearances, whether of terror issuing in self-dependence and neglect of Christ; or of supposed evangelical humiliation inducing professed dependence on Christ and free grace, whilst sin is not abhorred and avoided, nor holiness loved and practised, are superficial and hypocritical. Herod might have passed for a true penitent, if John would have allowed him his Herodias: yet John shall lose his head rather than Herod (notwithstanding promising appearances,) will part with his beloved lust; and human nature is just the same in other men as it was in Herod. Let no repentance therefore satisfy any man which doth not endear Christ and universal holiness; and divorce the heart from every sin, especially that which heretofore was the customary and beloved sin.

III. I would, from what hath been discoursed, take occasion to consider in few words, the nature and necessity of regeneration. No other religion but that which hath been described, requires that entire change which this term, and a variety of similar expressions in the sacred Scriptures, imply. A Pharisee's reformation, morality, and outward worship, require no entire inward renovation; and having no experience of it, nor seeing any occasion for it, with Nicodemus, he exclaims, "How can these things be?" The evangelical or antinomian self-deceiver also may have his opinions, affections, and confidence, without becoming a new creature; and will, therefore, whilst he uses the terms, mistake their import, and signify by them some of those enthusiastical impulses and revelations, which he experiences and boasts of.

But self-admiring, self-justifying man, will never exercise that self-loathing and self-condemning repentance which hath been described, except he be born again. Insensible to the attractions of heavenly objects through inordinate love of worldly things, he never will renounce and abhor all sin, mortify every lust, die to all carnal objects, and delight in God and universal holiness, except he be changed into a new creature, by the efficacious influences

* Some will, perhaps, be disposed to inquire, why I have not adopted the common distinction between *legal* and *evangelical* repentance. As these expressions do not occur in Scripture, every one is at liberty to use them or not; and the distinction did not appear to me sufficiently exact or comprehensive, for my purpose. True repentance has more respect to the law, as transgressed by sin, and justly condemning the sinner, than any false repentance can have. Whilst, on the other hand, men are more frequently seduced into a dependence on a superficial repentance, by unwarrantable presumptions of mercy, and false apprehensions of evangelical truth, than by slavish regard to the law. *Natural* and *spiritual* repentance seems to me a preferable distinction. By *natural repentance*, I would understand every sort of repentance of which a mere natural man is capable; by *spiritual repentance*, that which springs from true grace in the heart.

Digitized by Google

of the Holy Spirit; except "old things pass away, and all things become new."

This is the new birth so frequently spoken of in the sacred Scriptures. A new principle of divine life implanted in the heart, purifying the various powers of the soul. Hence proceed an enlightened understanding, a sound judgment in divine things, holy affections, a pure imagination, a sanctified memory, and a well-informed, tender, but not superstitious, conscience. Hence proceed new fears, new hopes, new joys, new sorrows, new aversions and desires, new dispositions, and a new life. Yet as these are in this life only imperfect in their degree, this imperfection of grace and remainder of corruption, extort from the true Christian bitter complaints: "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They put vigour into his prayers: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me:" they still find him employment for repentance and watchfulness, and endear free forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

Sinners should therefore be addressed in terms like these: All your aversion to this thorough repentance, and all your delays about it, only demonstrate your need of being born again. Should God implant in your heart such a new principle of holiness, as would make you relish and take pleasure in divine things, you would find it natural and easy to abhor sin, to mourn over it, and forsake it; to repent and do works meet for repentance. Have you then a real desire after this invaluable gift? If you have not, but prefer the quiet satisfaction of your carnal inclinations; you are justly left without that which you so despise. If you have, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

IV. I now take my leave of impenitent sinners with a serious expostulation. I mean such as are living, secretly or openly, in covetousness, injustice, lewdness, drunkenness, profaneness, or any known sin; who remember not to hallow the Sabbath, to read the Scriptures, to worship God, to relieve the poor, or to do any other known duty: or who proudly trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others, and neglect Christ and his salvation. Oh, make no more excuses or delays: "Flee from the wrath to come." "Evil pursueth sinners:" if it overtake you in impenitency, eternal misery is your dreadful portion. Yet, yet a long-suffering God has patience with you: the gospel invites, and Jesus stands with open arms to receive you; complains that you "will not come to him, that you may have life:" affirms with an oath, that "he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner," and, as with tears of compassion, adds, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Do you then love death? Will you slight such warnings, such expostulations, such invitations, such compassion? Well, if this prevail not, I must with reluctance leave you, as Paul did the Jews: "Your blood be upon your own head, I am free."

V. I now turn to thee, poor weeping penitent, who art almost inconsolable, and sinking in despondency. Thou scarcely canst hope that God will pardon so great a sinner; the expectation seems to border on presumption: yet still thy humiliation appears to thyself slight, and thy repentance superficial, and thy heart insensible: yea, though it is almost melted within thee, it feels like a very stone; and still thou pleadest, "Oh! take away the heart of stone, and give the heart of flesh." Behold, I bring thee glad tidings of great joy; and I shall share thy joy, if I may but be the instrument of administering peace and comfort to thee: "Come unto me," saith Jesus, "all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Behold, he calleth thee; be of good courage. All who will, may come; he hath given thee the willing mind, and will "in nowise cast thee out." He will bind up thy broken heart, and "give thee the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Only wait his time; let him probe thy wounds to the bottom; catch not impatiently at comfort; beg for still deeper

Digitized by Google

humiliation: use every means of increasing thy abhorrence of sin and watchfulness against it; and it shall not be very long before "he will shed abroad his love in thy heart," and cause thee "to abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." In the mean time reflect that whilst thou art mourning on earth, heaven resounds with joyful acclamations and praises on thy account: wait then and pray, and thou shalt ere long rejoice and praise too, and that for ever.

VI. But some perhaps will say, I have not this work to do now, I repented many years ago. What, art thou still a sinner and hast thou no need to repent! The true Christian can indeed thankfully say, My repentance is effectually begun: but only the saint in glory can truly say, My repentance is finished. The more a true believer knows of God and Christ, and the law and gospel; and the larger his experience is of his own depravity, and of the Lord's goodness, the more he hates sin; the more he recollects of his former sins, the quicker sense he hath of present sinfulness, and the deeper and purer is his repentance. He rejoices in the Lord with penitent joy, and mourns for sin with sweet and joyful mourning. His humility increases his thankfulness and admiration of the love of Christ, and enhances his consolation: for "it is a pleasant thing to be thankful." But if the thought that thy sins were pardoned, finished thy repentance, and dried up thy tears, thy repentance needs repenting of, and thou art awfully deceived.

Finally, My fellow Christians, let us frequently renew our recollection of former sins, our self-examination, our meditations on those subjects, which first excited our abhorrence of iniquity; especially our meditations on a bleeding Saviour. Let us daily renew our acceptance of Christ, in all his offices, seeking forgiveness of our daily transgressions through his blood; and exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man. Thus, as true penitents, endeavouring to glorify God, adorn the gospel, and serve our generation, we may hope to live in comfort, die in peace, and have "an entrance ministered to us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX.

Concerning Hallowing the Sabbath.

THROUGHOUT this Discourse, it hath been supposed, that there is in force a divine mandate of hallowing the Sabbath, which all are bound to obey, and contract guilt by neglecting. But the change in the dispensation, since the fourth commandment was given; the alteration of the day, from the seventh to the first of the week: and the manner in which that alteration was introduced, have afforded some persons an occasion of arguing against the obligation: the judgments of others seem unsettled, and perplexed about it: and those who profane the Sabbath, are by these things furnished with some plausible excuse, and preserved from remorse of conscience on that account. For these reasons, I judged it might be useful to subjoin a few brief hints upon the subject.

I. It should be noticed, that the Sabbath was appointed long before the ceremonial law, even from the creation of the world; and therefore cannot, in its own nature, be ceremonial. Gen. ii. 1—3. That the words of Moses should thus be understood, may be confirmed by the prohibition of gathering manna on the seventh day, Exod. xvi. 22—30. previous to giving any part of the law. The very language of the fourth commandment, "*Remember* the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," as well as the reason assigned in the close, evinces the same. And this is corroborated and illustrated by the general custom in many nations, through revolving ages, of computing time by weeks,

Digitized by Google

or periodical returns of the seventh day. Of this fact, no reason can be assigned so satisfactory, as supposing it to be the effect of an original institution, handed down by tradition, amongst all the descendants of Adam and Noah; which continued even after the appointment that gave rise to it was forgotten. *

II. The observation of the Sabbath, being made a part of the Mosaic dispensation, is interwoven with the whole system. It is enforced in the moral law of ten commandments, as delivered from Mount Sinai; introduced in the midst of the positive institutions; and enforced by temporal punishments to be executed by civil authority. This shews its importance; and evinces, that it partakes of the excellency of the moral law; forms an eminent part, and is fundamental to the maintenance of, all instituted worship: is typical of, and preparatory for, the heavenly Sabbath: and on every account is proper to be enforced by the authority of the magistrate, who may not draw his sword to propagate systems of doctrine or formulas of worship, but who may and ought to use his authority to repress immorality and profaneness, and to promote the public worship of God in the land. The substance of this commandment is of a moral nature. To separate some known, stated, and periodical portion of our time to religious purposes, when, all other engagements being postponed, men should assemble to worship God, and learn his will; is evidently an appointment resulting from the reason and nature of things. The glorious perfections of God; the rational nature of man; our relations and obligations to our Creator, Benefactor, Governor, and Judge; the honour which he requires, and which we owe him; our relations to each other, as social creatures, who can instruct, assist, affect, and animate one another by joining together in one common exercise; and our situation, in such a world as this,—all render such an ordinance indispensible. Repeal this commandment, prohibit this practice; you render public religion a matter of indifference, or you destroy it. Such a repeal or prohibition implies an absurdity; which cannot be said of the repeal or prohibition of any ceremonial precept. The honour and worship of God, the interests of religion and morality, and the best happiness of mankind, would be inadequately provided for, without such an observance.

III. We cannot, indeed, from the reason and nature of things, demonstrate, that exactly one day in seven, and neither more or less, is required for this moral duty. But the plain matter of fact, that God hath under every dispensation allotted that proportion invariably, amounts to the fullest demonstration, that infinite Wisdom judged it the best possible. And experience proves, that the conscientious observance of this proportion does not interfere with the advantageous management of either agriculture, manufactures, or commerce; is exceedingly favourable to the cause of liberty and humanity; tends greatly to civilize mankind as social creatures; and fully suffices for maintaining and advancing religion in the world, as far as it is generally and strictly observed.

IV. But whether the day to be observed be the first, or the last, or any other of the seven, is evidently in itself indifferent. Only some one day must be pitched upon, either by him that gives, or him that receives, the law. Nothing can be more reasonable, than that the Lawgiver should determine this matter, and all his subjects acquiesce. Nothing more desirable than to be, by his determination, delivered from uncertainty and disputation about it. But if he who first instituted one day, afterwards changed it for another, his authority demands our submission. He, who from the creation appointed the seventh day, in remembrance of its completion, appears to have changed that day for the first, when an event had taken place of still greater consequence to fallen sinners. We now every week commemorate the triumphant resurrection of our divine Redeemer. To avoid needlessly shocking Jewish

* The pains taken, by express edicts and by a new division of time, in a neighbouring nation, to form an exception to this rule, by men who are avowed enemies to Christianity, may help to shew the force of this argument.

Digitized by Google

prejudices, this, (as some other changes,) in the wisdom of God, was effected silently and gradually, by example, not by express precept. As Christians, all seem to have observed the first day of the week; the Jewish converts were connived at in observing the seventh also, together with circumcision, and their other ceremonies. Our risen Lord repeatedly met, and spake peace to his disciples, who on the first day of the week were assembled, if not the first time, yet, probably, afterwards by some intimation from him. It appears to have been on the first day of the week, when the disciples being of one accord in one place, the Holy Ghost came visibly and audibly among them. "On the first day of the week," they met to break bread, as well as to hear the word preached. On the first day of the week, they were directed to lay by for the poor, as God had prospered them in the preceding week. St John dignifies this day with the title of "the Lord's Day," which name alone shews in what manner and to what purposes it should be observed.* The *first* is the only day of the seven mentioned afterwards in the Scripture by way of favourable distinction; Sabbaths being spoken of as abrogated ceremonies. And as both ecclesiastical and civil history, with concurring evidence, represent it as the distinguishing practice of Christians, in all ages and nations ever since, to observe this day as sacred to religion.

V. Having determined its obligation, let us briefly consider how it should be hallowed. The Lord of the Sabbath hath himself repeatedly allowed of works of necessity and mercy; and in thus relaxing the rigour of the ceremonial part of the commandment, hath enforced the moral part, and implicitly prohibited all other works. But works of necessity must be so in reality, not in pretence. Settling accounts, writing letters of business or on common subjects, paying labourers, making provision for the indulgence of pride and luxury, with many more things of this kind, which create so much "*necessary*" work for the Lord's Day, are as bad as keeping open shop, and working at a trade, nay, worse, though less scandalous. No works which are done out of covetousness, pride, or luxury, can consist with hallowing a day to the Lord. Commiting known sin is serving Satan, and to employ the Lord's Day in Satan's service, proves a man his faithful, willing, and indefatigable servant. Diversions and trifling visits, (and indeed all visits the direct object and tendency of which is not to glorify God, and edify one another,) are inconsistent with hallowing the Sabbath. But men have no leisure on other days! that is to say, they have so much to do in the world, and for their bodies, that six days are too little; and so little to do about their souls, and for God, that one day is too much; and therefore they must borrow time from the latter to eke out the former. Idleness is as bad, or worse: for it implies, that we have nothing to do with spiritual things or with and for God; or nothing worth doing. But indeed we have enough important, profitable, and pleasant work to do on that day. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure, on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a Delight, the Holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD." Extraordinary diligence and earnestness in searching the Scriptures; examining our hearts and lives, our state and conduct; meditation and secret devotion; if we have families, instructing and praying for and with them; and repeatedly attending on public ordinances, will, even with early rising, require much of this holy day. Edifying conversation, joined with social worship, and acts of charity to the bodies and souls of men, demand all the remainder that can be spared from unavoidable avocations. He who values his immortal soul, or has any love to God, desire of his favour, delight in his service, or zeal for his glory, will not complain of being required thus to hallow one day in seven, as if it were a galling yoke; but will complain of

* Τῇ Κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, "The Lord's Day." Rev. i. 10. *Gr. Com.* Κυριακὸν Δεῖπνον, "The Lord's Supper." 1 Cor. xi. 20. The one in remembrance of the Lord's death,—the other his resurrection.

Digitized by Google

himself, if depraved nature seem weary: and he will deem it the best and most pleasant day in the week.

The general profanation of the Lord's day proves the dislike men have for religion, and the contempt which they have for the authority and commandment of the Lord. Of those who pay decent respect to the day, multitudes, we allow, are formal hypocrites; and Christians, indeed, serve God every day: but shall we, on such pretences, undervalue this divine appointment? God forbid!—That degree of reverence, small as it is, which is now paid to the Christian Sabbath, is so far a public protestation against Atheism, infidelity, and profaneness, and a profession of Christ's religion, which puts public honour upon God and his worship. All business being by appointment suspended, servants, labourers, mechanics, and tradesmen, that is, the bulk of mankind, have leisure and opportunity to assemble and hear the word of God; and faith comes by hearing. Multitudes crowd the places where the word of God is preached, and many are converted. True Christians, being sanctified but in part, lose much of the vigour of their affections, by their unavoidable intercourse with the world; which decays are repaired, together with an increase of knowledge and grace, by statedly and seriously hallowing the Sabbath. Could we but witness the universal hallowing of the Sabbath, we might reasonably hope for a proportionable increase of real religion.—Were it totally neglected, profaneness, ignorance, and infidelity, we may confidently foretel, *would*, barbarity, tyranny, and slavery, probably *might*, deluge the world. Let impartial judges then determine, from this imperfect sketch, who are the best friends of mankind; they who would tolerate and vindicate its profanation, or they who would enforce its strict observance.

With great satisfaction I would add, in closing this subject, the words of a celebrated writer, who has, with great effect, employed his talents in the cause of practical Christianity; *

"Let us appeal" (says he) "to that Day which is especially devoted to the offices of Religion; do they" (the bulk of nominal Christians) "joyfully avail themselves of this blessed opportunity of withdrawing from the business and cares of life, when without being disquieted by any doubt, whether they are not neglecting the duties of their proper callings, they may be allowed to detach their minds from earthly things, that by a fuller knowledge of heavenly objects, and a more habitual acquaintance with them their hope may grow more "full of immortality?" Is the day cheerfully devoted to those holy exercises for which it was appointed? Do they indeed "come into the courts of God with gladness?" and how are they employed when not engaged in the public services of the day? Are they busied in studying the word of God, in meditating on his perfections, in tracing his providential dispensations, in admiring his works, in revolving his mercies, (above all, the transcendent mercies of redeeming love,) in singing his praises "and speaking good of his name?" Do their secret retirements witness the earnestness of their prayers and the warmth of their thanksgivings, their diligence and impartiality in the necessary work of self-examination, their mindfulness of the benevolent duty of intercession? Is the kind purpose of the institution of a Sabbath answered by them, in its being made to their servants and dependents a season of rest and comfort? Does the instruction of their families, or of the more poor and ignorant of their neighbours, possess its due share of their time? If blessed with talents or affluence, are they sedulously employing a part of this interval of leisure, in relieving the indigent, and visiting the sick, and comforting the sorrowful; in forming plans for the good of their fellow-creatures, in considering how they may promote the temporal and spiritual benefits of their friends and acquaintance; or, if theirs be a larger sphere, devising measures whereby, through the divine blessing, they may become the honoured instruments of the more extended diffusion of religious truth? In the hours of domestic or social intercourse, does their

* See a Practical View of Christianity, by William Wilberforce, Esq. M. P.

Digitized by Google

conversation manifest the subject of which their hearts are full? Do their language and demeanour shew them to be more than commonly gentle, and kind, and friendly, free from rough and irritating passions.

"Surely an entire day should not seem long amidst these various employments. It might well be deemed a privilege thus to spend it, in the more immediate presence of our heavenly Father, in the exercises of humble admiration and grateful homage; of the benevolent, and domestic, and social feelings, and of all the best affections of our nature, prompted by their true motives, conversant about their proper objects, and directed to their noblest end; all sorrow mitigated, all cares suspended, all fears repressed, every angry emotion softened, every envious or revengeful or malignant passion expelled; and the bosom thus quieted, purified, enlarged, ennobled, partaking almost of a measure of the heavenly happiness, and become for a while the seat of love, and joy, and confidence, and harmony.

"The nature and uses, and proper employments of a Christian Sabbath, have been pointed out more particularly, not only because the day will be found, when thus employed, eminently conducive, through the divine blessing, to the maintenance of the religious principle in activity and vigour; but also because we must all have had occasion often to remark, that many persons, of the graver and more decent sort, seem not seldom to be nearly destitute of religious resources. The Sunday is with them, to say the best of it, a *heavy* day: and that larger part of it, which is not claimed by the public offices of the church, dully drawls on in comfortless vacuity; or without improvement is trifled away in vain and unprofitable discourse. Not to speak of those who, by their more daring profanation of this sacred season, openly violate the laws and insult the religion of their country, how little do many seem to enter into the *spirit* of the institution, who are not wholly inattentive to its exterior decorums! How glad are they to qualify the rigour of their religious labours! How hardly do they plead against being compelled to devote the *whole* of the day to religion, claiming to themselves no small merit for giving up to it a part, and purchasing therefore, as they hope, a right to spend the remainder more agreeably! How dextrously do they avail themselves of any plausible plea for introducing some week-day employment into the Sunday, whilst they have not the same propensity to introduce any of the Sunday's peculiar employment into the rest of the week! How often do they find excuses for taking journeys, writing letters, balancing accounts, or in short doing something, which by a little management might probably have been anticipated, or which, without any material inconvenience, might be postponed! Even business itself is recreation, compared with religion, and from the drudgery of this day of Sacred Rest, they fly for refuge to their ordinary occupations.

"Others again who would consider business as a profanation, and who still hold out against the encroachments of the card-table, get over much of the day, and gladly seek for an innocent resource in the social circle, or in family visits, where it is not even pretended that the conversation turns on such topics as might render it in any way conducive to religious instruction or improvement. Their families meanwhile are neglected, their servants robbed of Christian privileges, and their example quoted by others who cannot see that they are themselves less religiously employed, while playing an innocent game at cards, or relaxing in the concert-room.

"But all these several artifices, *whatever they may be, to unhallow* the Sunday and to change its character, (it might be almost said 'to relax its horrors,') prove but too plainly, however we may be glad to take refuge in religion, when driven to it by the loss of every other comfort, and to retain, as it were, a reversionary interest in an asylum which may receive us when we are forced from the transitory enjoyments of our present state, that *in itself* it wears to us a gloomy and forbidding aspect, and not a face of consolation and joy; that the worship of God is with us a *constrained*, and not a *willing* service, which we are glad therefore to abridge, though we dare not omit it."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

TREATISE

ON

GROWTH IN GRACE.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THE substance of the ensuing treatise was published in the form of an occasional sermon, in 1787, and though it did not attract any general attention, it was so favourably received by a few respectable persons, that the author has been repeatedly desired to reprint it. Upon reflection, however, he concluded that a treatise on the same important subject would have a greater probability of usefulness; and he accordingly has bestowed considerable pains in making the necessary alterations.

The sentiments and arguments of the sermon have been scrupulously preserved, as far as they seemed material to the subject; the whole has been revised with the greatest care and attention; very large additions have been made, the thoughts have been arranged in a new manner, and the author has gone as far in making the treatise complete, according to his views and ability, as was consistent with the compass prescribed to him: for he deemed it better to retrench and abridge, than, by advancing the price, to throw any hindrance in the way of its circulation.

September 1, 1795.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A

TREATISE

ON

GROWTH IN GRACE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE apostle Paul was evidently a man of strong passions, and peculiar sensibility; and being by Divine grace exceedingly filled with love to the Lord Jesus, and to the souls of men, his mind was affected with the most lively emotions of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, according to the tidings he received from the several churches of Christ. At one time he complains, that "he has no rest in his flesh," "is filled with heaviness," and "can no longer forbear;" and that he "writes out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears:" at another, he declares, that "he is filled with comfort, and is exceedingly joyful in all his tribulation, being comforted by the faith of his beloved children; for now," says he, "we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." He seems indeed to intimate, that these were "things which concerned his infirmities:" and doubtless this sanguine disposition requires much correction and regulation by Divine grace; but, when it is thus tempered, and counterbalanced by proportionable humility, wisdom, patience, and disinterestedness, it may be considered as the main-spring of a minister's activity. And as these united qualifications certainly conduced very much to the apostle's extraordinary usefulness, so they render his epistles peculiarly interesting to us, in all our inquiries concerning the best methods of promoting the enlargement and prosperity of the church, and the edification of all the true disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Among other peculiarities of his manner, it especially suits our present purpose to notice the animated glow of joy and affection, with which he addresses his Christian brethren.—Thus, when writing to the Philippians, he abruptly breaks forth, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you; always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." From the same fulness of heart he afterwards adds, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things." Phil. iii. 18, 19.

There are, alas! too many professors of the gospel in most places, whose conduct would constrain a believer of far less gracious sensibility than holy Paul, to weep at every recollection of them; but there are others also, on whose account we ought to "bless God without ceasing, whilst we remember their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thess. i. 3. Every faithful and affectionate pastor, therefore, will find cause for alternate sorrow and joy, whilst he reflects on the people, among whom he hath been called to labour.

Digitized by Google

But, while the apostle saw great cause for thankfulness on account of what the Lord had done for the Philippians, yet he was equally disposed to pray for them continually; not only, lest they should decline in zeal and diligence; but that they might make still greater progress in every thing pertaining to genuine Christianity. "For God," says he, "is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ; being filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God." Phil. i. 8—11. And in the subsequent parts of the epistle, he very copiously and pathetically exhorts them to follow after all those very things, for which he had most fervently prayed in their behalf.

These remarks on the writings of St. Paul may suggest some reflections, which are suited to introduce the subject of this treatise. A great part of that confusion, which pervades the discourses of many persons on religious topics, arises from inattention to the different characters of those, concerning whom the sacred writers speak, or to whom they address their instructions. In all endeavours to do good to the souls of men, it is especially necessary, that we "rightly divide the word of truth;" and apply it to the hearts and consciences of the persons addressed, according to their various characters and situations: for the portion which suits one man may be as improper for another, as the same medicine is for persons labouring under diseases of a contrary nature. If therefore the wise attention of the sacred writers to this important concern be overlooked by their readers; there will be the greatest reason to fear, lest they should wrest even the words of inspiration to their own destruction.

Every man, who will take the pains to examine, must be convinced, that the apostles addressed themselves to ignorant idolaters, careless sinners, bigotted Jews, proud Pharisees, profane scoffers, or hypocritical abusers of the gospel, in a manner adapted to their several cases; that they employed very different language, and used far other topics, when they were instructing serious inquirers, encouraging broken-hearted penitents, or "restoring, in the spirit of meekness," such as "had been overtaken in a fault:" and that they brought forward instructions and exhortations of a different nature, when they wrote to establish believers, or to those who had newly embraced the gospel, and were full of zeal, but in danger of being misled by false teachers, or drawn aside by manifold temptations.

It is, therefore, evident, that the exhortations of the apostles, and their prayers for the progress of their people in all holy affections and conduct, are entirely consistent with the doctrines of grace, for which they in other parts most zealously contend: seeing they have an exclusive reference to persons, who, "having been justified by faith, had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" "in whom they had redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of their sins, according to the riches of his grace:" For the Lord had "saved them, and called them with an holy calling, not according to their own works, but according to his own purpose and grace given them in Christ Jesus before the world began;" and the security of the new covenant engaged to them, that they should "be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." In imitation, therefore, of this example, and with a most zealous attachment to the same doctrines, the ministers of Christ should now also exhort those, whom, with heart-felt satisfaction, they regard as true believers, to follow after every branch of that holiness, which the apostles most pathetically recommended to their beloved children; and assuredly we sin against the Lord if we cease to pray for them in the same style and manner.

The ensuing treatise being especially intended for the benefit of those, who make a creditable and explicit profession of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, nothing will be spoken of those doctrines, in a way of controversy

Digitized by Google

or explanation; and very little addressed to such as do not believe them. The particular subject of inquiry will be, *in what that growth in grace, and progress in the divine life consists*, to which the apostles so strenuously and repeatedly exhort their Christian brethren? and on what account they were so earnest about these things, with those of whose conversion and salvation they had the fullest confidence? But as it is purposed to consider both the exhortations and prayers of the sacred writers, especially those of the apostolical epistles; it will be requisite to make a few more introductory remarks.

I. The frequent and fervent prayers, with which the instructions of the inspired writers are interspersed, decidedly prove, that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works," are from God; as our liturgy well expresses it: or, in the still more emphatic language of inspiration, that "every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above; and cometh down from the Father of lights."—Indeed every prayer for wisdom, holiness, or ability to perform good works, evidently implies, that communications from the fountain of perfection are necessary, in order to render us wise or holy; that we are warranted to expect such communications, notwithstanding our unworthiness; and that we ought to desire, apply for, and depend on them, in all our undertakings. They, therefore, who form higher notions of the native powers, resources, and excellencies of fallen man, must be very inconsistent in presenting prayers to this effect; and their religion must be very different from that of those primitive believers, who expected every good gift from the Father of lights, through Jesus Christ, and by the supply of his Spirit. From the fulness of the divine Saviour, they all received; that fulness still remains unexhausted and undiminished; and would we emulate their superior attainments, imitate their bright examples, or aspire to a large measure of their usefulness: the way is plainly marked out to us in the words of our Lord to his apostles, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." John xv. 5.

But the apostles did not deem prayers in behalf of their brethren, incompatible with exhortations to them, as their constant practice incontrovertibly proves. Many professors of the gospel continually express their astonishment, that their opponents cannot find the doctrines of grace in the sacred Scriptures: and it is indeed a just subject of surprise, for they are written there as with a sun-beam. But is it not equally so, that any man, who seems to reverence and to examine the word of God, should overlook all the exhortations and admonitions with which it abounds, as if they had never been written, or as if we had no concern in them? Yet this is actually the case: numbers are sure to object against every attempt to bring them forward, and to apply them with energy to the hearts and consciences of those, who are attached to the doctrines of grace, though without doubt they are, as much as these, a part of the "counsel of God;" and as strongly marked in Scripture.—Many allowances, indeed, must be made for a variety of prejudices, where the heart appears to be upright: yet it should be remembered, that the *pretended* mother consented to have the child divided; whilst the *real* parent in unfeigned affection, rather chose to risk the loss of her son, than accede to such a proposal. 1 Kings, iii. 26. When professors are thus disposed to curtail the Scriptures, it may be reasonably suspected that they do not cordially love them; but he, who from his heart says to the Lord, "Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it," will not consent to any such mutilation. He loves every part of the sacred volume, because it is all very pure: and even when he meets with passages, which excite his fears lest he should come short of the promised blessings; he does not reject or turn from them on that account; but meditates on them, till he becomes more watchful, diligent, and fervent in prayer, and thus finds that the whole of the word of God, "does good to him that walketh uprightly."

II. The exhortations of the apostles were principally addressed to such as they believed to be real Christians, children of God and heirs of heaven: and

Digitized by Google

their prayers in behalf of these persons especially related to their spiritual growth and proficiency. Hence we may certainly conclude, that there is something in Christianity, both desirable and attainable, besides the present comfort and the eternal salvation of the individuals, who have already embraced it. Indeed the salvation of one soul is an object of such magnitude, as no temporal interest is worthy to stand in competition with; but the glory of God, in the credit and the success of the gospel, and the everlasting state of immense multitudes, as connected with it, are beyond comparison more important. That *selfishness*, however, which is natural to fallen creatures, does not yield to any system of doctrine; unless it be accompanied by the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit; but if a person can satisfy himself with the hope of his own salvation, without any habitual regard to the honour of the gospel, or the eternal interests of other men, he is *entirely selfish*, and as evidently destitute of the mind and spirit of Christ, as the man, who, enjoying his own abundance, cares not how many are pinched with want, though even suffering through his injustice and oppression.

It is the constant aim, and fervent desire of all the faithful and well-instructed ministers of Christ, to excite the minds of their beloved people to a generous regard for the credit of the gospel, and a compassionate longing after the conversion of sinners: and the design of this treatise is to concur with their endeavours for this purpose; and to stir up the pure minds of believers, "by way of remembrance;" in hopes that thus, they may be induced and directed to "let their light shine more abundantly before men; that they may see their good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven:" Mat. v. 16. or, in other words, "to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—To him be glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SECTION I.

An enumeration of those particulars, in which the true believer's growth in grace consists; as far as they are explicitly contained in the apostle's prayer for the Philippians.

Growth implies the *existence* of all those things, in which an increase is experienced, perceived, or expected; so that the persons, for whom the subsequent discussion is especially intended, are supposed to possess in some measure all those graces or holy dispositions, in which a further growth is represented to be highly desirable, and actually attainable. In considering the subject, it would not perhaps be found expedient to confine our attention entirely to any single exhortation or prayer contained in the sacred writings; or to adhere to the method, which a strict regard to a system might impose. It is however proposed in this section, to confine our attention to the prayer which holy Paul offered in behalf of the Philippians: except as other Scriptures will be adduced in proof or illustration of the several particulars, which will thus pass under our consideration. In the subsequent part of the treatise some other subjects will be noticed, which seem requisite to complete the design, but are not conveniently reducible to any of the clauses of this comprehensive text. Phil. i. 9—11. I would only further premise, that the prayers offered by the sacred writers, when under the immediate influence of the divine Spirit, are peculiarly suited to shew us the real nature of that proficiency in genuine Christianity, which their benevolent and zealous minds so ardently longed to behold in their beloved people, as above all things conducive to their true prosperity, and the glory of their God and Saviour. And in some respects they may perhaps be more adapted to produce conviction in every mind, than exhortations or precepts can be: because they con-

Digitized by Google

vey the same instruction more inoffensively: with less appearance of assuming authority, and with more conciliating demonstrations of affection and good-will.

I. "This," says the apostle, "I pray, that your LOVE may abound yet more and more." He does not restrict the meaning of the term used by him; and it is therefore proper to give the largest scope to the subject, of which it is capable. The holy Scriptures speak of *love* in the most exalted terms: "Love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God: he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is LOVE." "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him" "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "The end of the commandment," or the revelation made by the Lord to sinful men, "is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." (ανυποκριτος, 1 Tim. i. 5.) "Nothing availeth in Christ Jesus, but faith, which worketh by love." "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the *greatest* of these is love." Faith alone justifies the sinner, by forming his relation to Christ; and by faith alone can a man receive all needful grace from his fulness: hope of eternal glory, grounded on God's promises, and sealed by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, is the anchor of the soul, and the helmet of salvation: but LOVE is the substance of that holiness and felicity to which we are recovered, through the efficacy of faith and hope. The scaffolding is indispensably necessary: but when the edifice is completed, it is taken down as an encumbrance. Thus faith will be lost in sight, and hope swallowed up in enjoyment, when love shall be brought to perfection; but love will remain for ever, the temper, employment and happiness of heaven itself. Love is indeed that distinguishing essential of true religion,

> "Which hypocrites could ne'er attain,
> "Which false professors never knew;"

for "every one that loveth is born of God." This cannot mean that sinful men are in every sense, incapable of *love*: but only, that they cannot exercise that affection in a holy manner according to the reasonable law of God. For love is the ruling passion of the soul, and gives the direction to all the rest: but in our present disordered state, it is become incapable of fixing on its proper objects, and is, therefore, prostituted to such as are worthless or abominable. An unholy heart cannot love holiness; "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and cannot be subject to his holy law, or view with delight any object that bears his image. Some kind of gratitude may be felt or manifested by an unregenerate sinner, when his inclinations are gratified, when impending danger is averted, or when he presumptuously deems himself an heir of salvation; and he may have an instinctive benevolence towards men, without any suitable regard to God.

Yet these do not constitute that love, of which the apostles spoke in such exalted terms: though gratitude and benevolence, when they spring from proper principles, and connect with other holy affections, may be ranked among the most important of its exercises.—But the holy character of God, with all that immediately relates to him, or bears the stamp of his moral perfections, is the object of our proud aversion and contempt; discoveries of the Divine glory and excellency excite proportionable enmity; nor can any benefits overcome our dislike to the holiness of our Benefactor, so long as we continue unregenerate: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

In regeneration, however, a capacity of spiritual perception is communicated to the soul, in a manner which we can neither explain nor comprehend; and we are by it enabled to discern the holy excellency and beauty of heavenly things. This produces a revolution in our judgment and affections: "old things pass away, behold, all things become new:" our love is now diverted, as it were, from its former base attachments; and we gradually learn to esteem, admire, choose, desire, relish, and delight in that spiritual excellency, which was before the object of our aversion and contempt. The heart now

Digitized by Google

becomes in some degree *holy*, proportionably loves holy persons, and holy things: we are spiritually-minded, and habitually seek our pleasure in spiritual pursuits and employments.—This capacity of spiritual perception is not a new faculty added to the soul, but the ability of exercising every faculty which God hath given us, in a suitable manner, about the grand concerns of religion; for which our apostacy from our Creator, and idolatrous attachment to the creatures, had wholly disqualified us. It is therefore, represented in Scripture by images taken from our bodily senses: the regenerate soul *sees* heavenly beauty, *hears* divine harmony, *smells* fragrancy as of "ointment poured forth," and *tastes* sweetness as of "honey and the honey-comb." Yet these perceptions in the new convert are feeble and indistinct; and often almost overborne and swallowed up in the tumult of natural passions, and the conflict with carnal propensities; they, however, uniformly influence him as "a new born babe to desire the sincere milk of the word, that *he may grow thereby*, seeing that he has tasted that the Lord is gracious." 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3. And they constitute that leaven, which will gradually diffuse its influence, till the whole be leavened, and all the faculties, affections, and operations of the soul be made to partake of the same holy nature and tendency.

When we are thus made capable of perceiving, in some degree, the beauty and glory of the Divine perfections, and of forming some proper estimate of our obligations and relations to our Creator and Benefactor; we are brought to consent to his holy law, that it is good, and that its commands, though very strict and spiritual, are reasonable, equitable, and beneficial: and the view of the evil of sin, which is thus obtained, though it be imperfect, produces a submission to the justice of God in the condemnation of transgressors. Other discoveries of our guilt and danger, and of the wrath to which we are exposed, may alarm us; but nothing short of this can produce genuine humiliation and self-abasement; which will be matured and increased by fuller views of the glory of God in the person and salvation of Christ.

For did we only contemplate the perfections of God, as displayed in the works of creation and providence, or illustrated by the justice of his law and government, our consciousness of guilt and pollution would so discourage us, and even lead us to the borders of despair, that we should be induced to struggle with all our might against conviction, and to oppose the humiliating effect of every discovery of God to our souls, which we were unable to exclude. But when we are led to perceive, along with our views of the odiousness and desert of our sins, the glory of God in the harmonious display of all his attributes, through the person and redemption of his Son: this allays our terrors, inspires our hope, and fixes our attention; while it exceedingly increases humiliation, and self-abasement.—The dignity of the Divine Redeemer, the nature of his undertaking, the immensity of his compassionate and condescending love, the perfection and value of his righteousness, the depth, intenseness, and variety of his sufferings; the honour thus given to the law and justice of God; the sufficiency of his atonement; his subsequent resurrection, triumphant ascension, and glorious exaltation; his power, faithfulness, and love; his gracious invitations, and precious promises; with the manifold blessings which he freely bestows on the vilest of sinners, who come to God by him;—these are all distinct subjects for our meditation, peculiarly suited to interest, instruct, and affect our minds, and to give us entirely new thoughts of God and of ourselves, of sin and holiness, of our immortal souls, our eternal concerns, our past lives, our present conduct and situation, and of all those things which concur to produce deep humility, lively hope, admiring love and gratitude, and every holy affection. Here without dismay we may contemplate the divine character with fixed attention; whilst we view it through a medium that softens its splendours, and endears its beauty and glory to our hearts. Here we view infinite justice, holiness, mercy, faithfulness, and wisdom, in perfect harmony, whilst each attribute reflects glory on all the rest. At the same time, our interest in these grand concerns render them far more affecting to our

Digitized by Google

minds: and we are enabled, in revering and adoring the holy majesty of God, and admiring his transcendent excellency, to give up our hearts to the pleasing desire and hope of having him, sinful as we are, to be our Father, Friend, and everlasting Portion. When we have been encouraged to make this choice and indulge this hope, we begin to fear above all things, lest we should come short of it: we learn to take pleasure in such devout exercises, as strengthen our confidence, or give us some anticipation of our desired felicity: we feel lively emotions of gratitude for the condescending and merciful dealings of so glorious a Lord with such vile sinners; we long for others also to know and love him, to enjoy his favour, and to render him praise: we become zealous for his honour, grieved when we offend him, ashamed and humbled at the recollection of past transgressions, watchful against temptation and every occasion of sin, and troubled at hearing others express contempt or enmity against so gracious and merciful a God and Saviour.—All these varied exercises of holy love have respect to the incomprehensible mysteries of the Divine nature, displayed in the grand scheme of our salvation; as originating from the most free love of the Father, purchased for us by the atonement of the incarnate Son, and applied to our hearts by the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit;—but it will especially centre, as it were, in the person of Emmanuel, God manifested in the flesh; as the glorious excellency and loveliness of the Deity is there more immediately revealed to us; and as he that loves, honours, believes, and obeys the Son, loves, honours, believes, and obeys the Father that sent him; for "he that hath the Son, hath the Father also;" and Christ is the appointed medium by which we approach, know, and glorify the invisible God.

The same capacity of perceiving and loving spiritual excellency, which is essential to every exercise of holy love towards our God and Saviour, disposes us also to "delight in his law after the inward man;" to "count all his commandments in all things to be right; and to hate every false way;" to "choose the precepts of the Lord;" and to "long to have our ways directed to keep them." Whilst these therefore are our desires and prayers, we must be proportionably grieved and disquieted with the opposition made to all our endeavours, by "the sin that dwelleth in us:" and the want of more entire conformity to that holy, just and good law, which we now most cordially approve, will be a constant source of sorrow and cause of humiliation; and at some times will prove the burden or even the terror of our hearts; and thus the believer's tears, groans, and complaints, because "he cannot do the things which he would," being connected with evident conscientiousness and diligence in performing the will of God, may be considered as a proof that he has the holy law of God written in his heart by regenerating grace.

The same holy judgment and taste of the renewed soul enables the believer to relish every part of the sacred Scriptures; and, in proportion to the degree of his spirituality, he loves to read and meditate upon the word of God: he not only uses it as "the lantern of his paths," or the ground of his hope; but he makes it his "delight and his counsellor;" he esteems it "more than his necessary food;" and feels an appetite for its salutary instruction like that of the new-born babe for the milk of the breast.—The same principle causes him to love the house of God, and to "count one day in his courts better than a thousand." He is no longer glad of an excuse for staying from the public ordinances of God, exact in determining how often he is bound in duty to attend on them, or disposed to yield to every petty obstacle that renders such attendance inconvenient or difficult; for "he is glad when it is said to him, let us go unto the house of the Lord:" he longeth, when detained from it, for the renewal of that satisfaction he has there experienced in communion with God and his saints; and he finds it no easy matter to be resigned to the will of God, when under a necessity to absent himself.—Thus the Lord's day, which was formerly a weariness, unless profaned by worldly

Digitized by Google

business, pleasure, or company, becomes his delight: and, though too often he has reason to lament that his Sabbaths are passed without the expected satisfaction and advantage, yet he still meets their return with pleasure, and deems them the happiest days of his life. As he grows in holy love he is enabled to adopt the Psalmist's words, in respect of the worship he renders to the Lord, and to say, "My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst I praise thee with joyful lips:" and every thing that relates to the service of God is endeared to his heart, and held in reverence and honour.

In like manner, he perceives the "beauty of the Lord" in the character and conduct of his people, whom before he neglected, despised, or disliked: and thus he learns to love and respect them as the excellent of the earth. He chooses them for his most valued companions: he sympathizes with their joys and sorrows; he seeks their welfare, and according to his ability endeavours to promote it; he bears with their failings and prejudices, casting the mantle of love over their infirmities: he prays for their prosperity and happiness: and if he can but see, or think he sees, the image of his beloved Lord upon them, he counts them his brethren, though they belong not to his subdivision of the church, subscribe not exactly his creed, and fill up a very different station in the family of God.

The admiring contemplation of the glory of the Lord, in the person and salvation of Christ, is always productive of a gradual transformation of the soul into his holy image: 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18. and the Saviour's condescending and compassionate love, to the very persons whose crimes he most deeply abhorred, appears peculiarly beautiful and endearing to the redeemed sinner. Thus benevolent love to mankind in general is produced and increased; selfish and contracted prejudices are removed; and proud contempt of the mean, the vile, and the ignorant, bitter resentments borne to the injurious, and envy of rivals and competitors, are changed into pity and good-will. While conformity to Christ, love to his most beautiful and glorious character, gratitude for redeeming love, and willing obedience to his commandments, combine their energy in disposing his true disciples to love strangers and persecutors, the most abandoned transgressors, and the most provoking enemies; and to copy his example of long-suffering, meekness, forgiveness, compassion, fervent prayers and tears for them, and persevering endeavours to overcome evil with good.

When love, the ruling principle of activity in the mind of man, is thus fixed on its proper objects, and regulated, proportioned, and exercised according to the Divine law of God; it is evident that all spiritual worship, humble submission, and devoted obedience to God, with all righteousness, goodness, and truth, in our conduct towards men must result from it, and grow in proportion as it is increased. We may, therefore, easily perceive the propriety of the apostle's prayer for the Philippians, "that their love might abound yet more and more."—This accords with many other prayers and exhortations in his epistles. "The Lord grant—that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded *in love*,—may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." Eph. iii. 16.—19. "The Lord made you to abound in love, one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you;—to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness." "Ye are taught of God to love one another; and indeed ye do it: but we beseech you to increase more and more." 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. iv. 9, 10. "Your Faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth." 2 Thess. i. 3. Indeed the love of believers towards each other is principally meant in these texts: but then we know that this love is the result, the evidence, and the measure of our love to God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.—We are required to consider every true Christian as the brother and representative of our unseen Redeemer; and all the love we bear to them, and the good we do them, for his sake, will be acknowledged and graciously recompensed at the last day, as the indubitable proof of the reality and strength of our love to him.

Digitized by Google

But let us more particularly consider the words before us.—"That your love may *abound:* may abound *more*, may abound *yet* more; may abound *yet more and more!*" *Press forward*, is the Christian's motto, and the minister's watch-word. "We beseech you, brethren, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God; so ye would abound more and more." 1 Thess. iv. 1. The lively believer is never in this world satisfied with his degree of sanctification; but still hungers and thirsts for more entire conformity to the image and law of GOD: and the zealous minister never thinks his beloved people arrived at the summit of improvement; but, while he says, "I bless God ye abound in love;" he also adds, "I pray God you may abound yet more and more:"—and, "Seeing ye have purified your souls, in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, —see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." 1 Pet. i. 22.

Comparing these Scriptures with our Lord's declaration, "Every branch in me, that beareth fruit, my Father purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit," John xv. 1—5. we may properly advert to a notion very prevalent in some places, among professors of the gospel. It is considered by them as a thing of course for true Christians to "*leave their first love;*" young converts are supposed to abound most in love; and it is expected that they will decline in that respect, as the advance to maturity in judgment and experience. The expression used in conveying these ideas, is found but once in Scripture. "Nevertheless," says Christ to the Ephesian church, "I have somewhat against thee; because thou hast *left thy first love*: remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; else I will come unto thee quickly, and I will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Rev. ii. 4, 5. The severe rebuke, the earnest exhortation, and the solemn warning of this passage, as connected with the commendation bestowed on the Ephesians, in other respects, do not seem calculated to encourage men in reducing the before mentioned opinion to practice. And it should also be observed, that the stony-ground hearers lost their lively affections, and their religion along with them, "because they had no root in themselves."

Surely nothing can be more absurd, than to suppose that a Christian, when *growing in grace*, can decline in that very thing, in which grace principally consists! and love is evidently the greatest of all Christian graces. 1 Cor. xiii. 13. Such a sentiment is most pernicious in its tendency and effects: it gives encouragement to hypocrites, who disgrace the profession of the gospel; assists many in deceiving themselves; and induces unstable and injudicious believers indolently to yield to lukewarmness as a matter of course, and even an evidence of spiritual proficiency; when they ought to be watching and praying against it, and greatly alarmed and humbled on the least consciousness of its growing upon them, from a conviction of its being one of the most detestable and aggravated proofs of human depravity.—By this stratagem, Satan hath succeeded, during a lukewarm age, in establishing a false text and standard of maturity in experience and the life of faith; and hath managed in consequence to render it *true in fact:* that is, *professors of the gospel do generally thus decline.* Thus the sentiment becomes specious, by an appeal to observation and experience for the truth of it; and he, who ventures to say, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be," is thought to condemn the generation of God's children.

But what saith Christ to the Laodiceans? "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Rev. iii. 16.—This strange opinion stands, not only unsupported by Scripture, but in direct opposition to it: the question is not how things are? but how they ought to be? The comparative coldness and negligence, for which he is very deeply humbled: but upon the whole the vigour of his love is continually increasing, and he manifests this to be the case in his whole conduct. To pray "that our love may abound yet more and more;" or, "that we may grow in grace," and make progress in experimental religion, amounts

Digitized by Google

nearly to the same thing; at least there is an inseparable connection between the two petitions, and they reciprocally imply each other.—We shall, however, in some measure discover by what means the preceding most detestable sentiment has insinuated itself among pious, humble Christians, whilst we proceed to consider the next clause of the apostle's prayer.

II. Not satisfied with desiring that their "love might abound yet more and more,"—he subjoined these words, "in knowledge and in all judgment;" and they suggest to us a second particular, in which growth of grace very greatly consists. There may be very high affections about religion, without the communication of holy principles: surprise at extraordinary and unexpected events; sanguine hopes of advantages, which appear very great and glorious; sudden transitions from adversity to prosperity, from sorrow to joy, or from pain to pleasure; and every circumstance which excites self-complacency or strong confidence, will involve or occasion a great flow of vehement affections, in the concerns of religion as well as in those of this life. Thus the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea, beholding their formidable enemies dead on the shore, and amazed at their own most extraordinary deliverance, "believed the word of the Lord and sang his praise:" but this apparently good frame in a vast majority of them continued no longer than till their inclinations were thwarted; and "they soon forgat the works of God, and would not abide in his counsel." These affections are not of a permanent nature: and, if a man possess nothing better, "he has no root in himself, and in time of temptation will fall away."

The new convert indeed experiences and manifests a similar flow of affections. The Lord, in making a Christian, does not destroy the original constitution of the human soul; and the natural passions are useful in the infancy of the Divine life to produce a proper degree of earnestness and diligence. But with them there exists a spark of heavenly love, which gathers strength whilst they are weakened, and glows more vigorously under their almost expiring ashes.—As this principle acquires energy and ascendency, it suffices to produce activity, and thus to subordinate and regulate all inferior affections: then every kind of earnestness, which did not spring from knowledge, and was not exercised in judgment and discretion, becomes unnecessary, and may abate without any detriment.

All *holy* affections spring from Divine illumination, and increase with the advancement of spiritual knowledge and genuine experience. In proportion as the Christian is enabled to discern more clearly and distinctly the nature and excellency of heavenly things; and as he experiences more fully the pleasure they are capable of affording; the more will he love and delight in them. The reasons which induce him to love the Lord, and his truths, precepts, and people, are perceived with increasing evidence; his thirst after happiness in the favour of God, his supreme valuation of redemption and salvation in Christ, his gratitude to Him, and zeal for his glory, with attachment to his cause, and devotedness to his service, appear more and more reasonable, in proportion as his mind is truly enlightened by his influences of the Holy Spirit.—He also better understands, why "he who loves God should love his brother also;" and why he ought to copy the forbearance, compassion, and mercy, of which his redeeming Lord hath given him an example.—As his views enlarge, he learns to pay less regard to the strong emotions of the animal spirits, which produce very pleasing but transient sensations, than to that steady and powerful affection, which influences a man to habitual self-denying obedience; and which connects with disinterested endeavours to "do good to all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith:" and he accustoms himself to judge of the sincerity and degree of his love, not by certain fluctuations in his feelings, but by its energy, in prevailing on him to renounce, venture and endure every thing, in promoting the glory of God and the good of his redeemed people. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."—Thus the Christian may actually abound more and more in love,

Digitized by Google

as connected with knowledge, when ignorant and selfish passions have subsided: the tumult of his feelings may be greatly abated, when the energy of pure and heavenly love is proportionably increased: and, as impetuous affections and vehement zeal, accompanied with pride and anger, become less and less apparent, he may manifest far more of that love, which "suffers long and is kind, which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things." In short, that love, which is shown "in deed and in truth," may abound exceedingly, when heavenly wisdom and deep humility have made the Christian ashamed of those ostentatious appearances of love, which consist principally "in word and in tongue," in high professions, noisy disputings, and cheap protestations. 1 Cor. xiii. James ii. 15, 16. iii. 13—18. 1 John iii. 16—20.

This will appear more evidently, by considering the other expression employed by the apostle on this occasion,—"in all *judgment*." The word is taken from the bodily senses, and may in some degree coincide with the spiritual perception before described; but it implies also promptitude and exactness of discernment, as acquired by enlarged knowledge and experience, and it is peculiarly applicable to those persons, "who, by reason of use, (or *habit*,) have their senses exercised to discern good and evil." We may, therefore, take the word in the common meaning, for the mental perception, when it distinguishes objects, "as the ear tries sounds," and as the mouth tries meats; and this habit of judging accurately and promptly concerning those matters with which we are conversant, is peculiarly useful in every part of our conduct.

That zeal, which springs from vehement affection, without proportionable knowledge and judgment, generally wastes its vigour about things frivolous, worthless, or injurious: it is tarnished with arrogance, bitterness, and censoriousness: it renders men inattentive to the duties of their station and relations in life, and regardless of propriety and decorum: it influences them to attempt things impracticable or romantic, by rash and unwarrantable means, and it hurries them into such tempers and actions, as needlessly increase the prejudices of mankind against the gospel and its professors. But when the heart is upright, and a man is favoured with sound instruction and prudent counsel, even his mistakes will abate his confidence and precipitation, and reiterated disappointments will render him more cautious and considerate. In proportion as he grows in grace, he will learn humility, and simplicity of dependence on the Lord, and discover the duties of his station; he will also become capable of distinguishing between those things, which may be attempted with a reasonable prospect of success, and such as however desirable, cannot prudently be undertaken: and he will watch and wait for the openings of providence; sensible that it is highly important to confine himself to scriptural and warrantable means, in all his endeavours to bring others over to his sentiments. The rashness, ostentation, and forwardness of his disposition being thus abated, the exercise of his love will be less observable to mankind in general, even when the vigour of it is exceedingly increased, and the effects more beneficial and permanent than before. "The wisdom, that is from above, is first pure; then peaceable; gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy: and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." James iii. 13—18. The man therefore who is directed by this wisdom, will not be so eager to engage in violent disputes about doctrines as formerly: but he will be far more careful to understand, and attend to, the several duties of his station, submissively to honour his superiors and seniors, and obey those that are placed over him, in all things lawful; to win them by the silent preaching of a blameless life; by a meek and quiet spirit; by sincerity and integrity in word and deed; and by a persevering endeavour

Digitized by Google

to render all connected with him easy and happy. His love will vent itself more in fervent prayers for others; which is a secret but most effectual way of usefulness: he will improve his influence in his circle to some good purposes, and be daily increasing it by consistency and conscientiousness: he will peaceably occupy with his talent, as he hath opportunity; and when more favourable occasions are presented, he will gladly embrace them.

It is not sufficient that we are sure the service in which we are about to engage is a good work; we should also be satisfied that it is the service to which the Lord hath called us; and this frequently cannot be determined without much knowledge and sound judgment. In a great house there are many servants; and it is not enough that they are all employed about their master's work: for, unless every one knows and performs the duty of his proper place, confusion and disturbance will be inevitable; many things will be left undone, and almost every thing done amiss.—"The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and *to every man his work*:" and, when every one peaceably, intelligently and diligently minds his proper business, the affairs of the church, as well as those of the family, are managed respectably and advantageously. True wisdom, therefore, consists very much in a man's understanding the duties of his station, and performing them in a quiet and exemplary manner: and love abounds to the best purpose, when it is exercised "in knowledge and in all judgment." The apostle, therefore, ceased not to pray for the Colossians, "that they might be filled with the *knowledge of the will of God*, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that they might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Col. i. 9. 10. He exhorted the Ephesians to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise:—and understanding *what the will of the Lord is*," Eph. v. 15—17. And he thus counselled the Corinthians, "Be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men." 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

Moreover, a defect in judgment, while love is very fervent, often produces a disproportionate zeal and earnestness: so that attention to one part of a man's duty swallows up, as it were, all due regard to others. Thus love to public ordinances, or Christian conversation, frequently misleads professors to neglect their families and necessary worldly business, or to be inattentive to relative duties; and this brings reproach on the word of God. Social religion also often interferes with the exercises of the closet, and prevents *growth in grace*; which cannot be expected without much secret self-examination, recollection, meditation, and prayer. And in this way one holy disposition entrenches on another; boldness excludes meekness and prudence, or meekness and prudence degenerate into timidity; and various excesses of this kind render men's profession of the gospel rather a mis-shapen monster, than a beautiful well-proportionate figure, as Christianity is represented in the Scripture. But the increase of knowledge and judgment, while holy love also acquires permanent energy, leads a man to assign every duty its proper place and order; and to cultivate every holy disposition in due proportion and harmony with other graces. Thus redundancies being retrenched, deficiences supplied, irregularities corrected, natural propensities restrained, and *apparently* opposite graces brought to coalesce, a man's religion possesses symmetry and beauty, and he "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." 2 Peter i. 5—7.

The fervent affections of a young convert resemble a fire of thorns, which furiously blazes and crackles, but communicates little heat, and is speedily extinct; while the intelligent and judicious love of a mature Christian may be compared to the steady fire made of substantial fuel, which burns silently, and durably produces far greater effects.—Or, to use another illustration:—Suppose an unconverted person should be delivered, in a most surprising manner, from imminent danger by shipwreck; he would doubtless experience a variety of conflicting passions, and manifest very strong affections; while

Digitized by Google

his joy and amazement would be connected with a kind of natural gratitude to God for his preservation: but this would produce no abiding change in his dispositions and conduct. Whereas, should this man, after some years, be truly converted, he would probably never be able to recover the lively sensations, and high affections, which he felt when first escaped from the jaws of death: yet, understanding more distinctly the nature and value of the mercy vouchsafed him, his own extreme unworthiness, the imminent danger to which his immortal soul was exposed, and the astonishing love of God in rescuing him from it, that he might at length become his salvation; his affections, though less tumultuous, would be more rational, and his gratitude would produce a proportionable effect on his future behaviour.

In fine, lively affections without knowledge and judgment, betray men into enthusiasm, delusion, absurdity, and inexcusable practices; which injure themselves, mislead others, and disgrace the gospel:—while knowledge and judgment, when separated from holy love, puff up the professor, and like a stagnating pool become useless or noxious. But the happy union of them in the same character constitutes the highest excellency that can be found on earth; of which the apostle himself seems to have been the most illustrious instance, that hath been found among mere men, from the beginning of the world to the present time. In these things he followed Christ, and prayed for his brethren that they might follow him. Yet he deemed not himself to have already attained; but felt the necessity of "pressing forward, forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth to those things that were before." And, as we, most assuredly, are far beneath him in these invaluable attainments, if we would in a compendious manner know the nature of *growth in grace*, we should study his character, and copy his example; according to his exhortation to the beloved Philippians. Phil. iii. 12—21.

It may be proper in this place to observe, that certain persons, either *designedly* or *inconsiderately* countenancing Antinomian tenets, object to the sentiment, that the law of God is the believer's *rule of conduct*, under the pretence, "that love renders such a rule unnecessary." But it should be considered that love undirected by any rule, cannot be exercised "in knowledge and in all judgment." Love is the first principle, or main-spring of a believer's conduct: but it cannot be also the regulator: for nothing requires so much regulation, as the exercise of this affection, in respect of the various objects of it, the proportion due to each, and the manner in which it is to be expressed.—The sails, receiving the impulsive energy of the wind, put the vessel in motion; but they would only hurry it upon some rock or quicksand to its destruction, or at best drive it far from its intended course, were they not managed according to the rules of navigation, in connection with the pilot's attention to the helm, and the observation made respecting the progress and situation of the vessel. He, therefore, who rejects the holy commandment, as the rule of his conduct, under the vain pretence that fervent love supersedes all occasion for such a rule, acts as absurdly, as mariners would do, should they crowd all the sail they could, and disdain to attend to the helm, the compass, or to nautical observations; because not necessary to hasten the progress of the vessel.—Love is indeed the fulfilling of the law: but it should be remembered, that we are required to love God with all our *understanding*, as well as with all our heart: "and this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

III. The apostle next prays for his brethren, that "they might approve things that are excellent:" or as it might more literally be rendered, "*that they might prove things that differ*," and so learn to distinguish between things genuine, and their most specious counterfeits. This indeed is but a further advancement of the same principles and affections, in their progress towards perfection: yet it may be considered as another particular of great importance to our growth in grace; and may be viewed according to the two distinct translations which have been given to the text, only reversing the order of them.

Digitized by Google

We may first make some remarks on the exercise and improvement of the distinguishing faculty as an essential part of our spiritual advancement to maturity. The inherent excellency of some things above others exists previous to our discernment of it; and we have seen that the capacity of perceiving this excellency, which is the source of spiritual love for it, is the peculiar effect of regeneration; but we may here add, that, like the capacities we receive from nature, it may be improved or retarded in its operations; want of information or exercise may keep it obtuse and feeble; suitable instructions and habits may render it more acute, exact, and vigorous.—Now the Lord is pleased to work by means, in the kingdom of grace, as well as in that of nature; and the children of God require and profit by, education, in the same manner as our children. Nay, spiritual capacities differ in degree like natural abilities, with which they have probably some connection. As, therefore, a man of inferior talents, cultivated by a good education, will in many respects possess advantages over a man of greater natural powers, which have been left uncultivated; so experience proves, that something analogous to this takes place among believers. Every regenerate man has some measure of spiritual discernment, but the disproportion, in which some possess it above others, is immensely great.

Next to an upright heart, and a spirit of active love, nothing seems to be of more importance to a consistent, useful, and comfortable life, than this accuracy of the distinguishing faculty; without which, even the fervour of spiritual love will often be wasted upon counterfeits, or exercised in uncertainty. "Satan transforms himself into an angel of light; and his ministers are transformed into ministers of righteousness." Even pious men differ widely in their sentiments, about many parts of religion: they are often very confident in their opinions and eager in defending them: thus controversies are multiplied, and agitated with unchristian vehemence and pertinacity: and we cannot but meet with various specious objections to our views of truth, and manifold difficulties in all we read and hear. Hence we may perceive the importance of cultivating a readiness and accuracy of trying and distinguishing sentiments, pretensions, and practices, according to the maxims and decisions of God's word:—but this cannot be done, without a patient investigation of the sacred oracles, and a persevering endeavour in habituating ourselves "to compare spiritual things with spiritual," and consider things according to their nature and tendency, or the relations and proportions which they bear to one another. A constant and simple dependence on the promised teaching of the Holy Spirit is also requisite, in order that we may "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." And that we may be able to digest without difficulty the strong meat, which belongeth to them that are full of age, and who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Eph. iv. 14. Heb. v. 14.

We ought most willingly to receive information from every one, and to be always learners; but our Lord has forbidden us to "call any man master upon earth."—We should thankfully use the help of others to point out objects to us; but we must at last see them with our own eyes, or not at all. Every constituent of humility and teachableness is comprised in that man's temper, who examines with candid attention such sentiments, as have any respectable claim to his notice; who weighs the arguments by which they are supported, comparing them with the standard of Scripture; who earnestly prays for the teaching of the Holy Spirit to assist him in forming his judgment concerning them; and who observes the rules of modesty and meekness in opposing such sentiments as he deems erroneous.—To go further than this would render us the disciples of men; and however specious in appearance, it is generally the offspring of indolence and want of seriousness; it betrays a comparative disregard to the importance of divine truth; and it forms a convenient excuse for shunning the trouble of reflection and patient investigation.

Digitized by Google

A comprehensive acquaintance with Christianity in its full extent, in the dependence, subordination, harmony, and proportion, which every doctrine bears to all the other parts of the system; with an accurate knowledge of the temper and conduct becoming believers in all the relations of life, and the situations in which they are or may be placed, is an attainment of great importance and difficulty: nor can any tolerable proficiency be made in it, without great diligence, and persevering application of mind for a long time, especially as most men can only spare a short portion of every day or week from other duties, for such investigations. Yet, without some considerable measure of this acquaintance with the subject, how shall a man be able to distinguish between *truth*, and *error artfully disguised*? Between *good*, and *evil speciously proposed*? Between genuine and counterfeit experience? Between solid and plausible arguments and objections? Without a degree of accuracy in spiritual perception, how can the believer separate the precious from the vile, when Satan, by means of false teachers, or by partially misleading pious men, mingles the poison of false doctrine with the wholesome food of divine truth? How shall he draw the water of life pure and wholesome, when immense pains are taken to corrupt the wells of salvation? How escape the snares of the enemy, who seldom tempts pious persons to gross crimes, but seduces them by the appearance of good? How avoid the extremes, into which he never fails attempting to drive the friends of truth; or avoid being frighted from those things which are excellent by hard names? Without this, how can we be enabled to withstand and oppose the prevailing heresies of the times; or maintain our ground against the demands of human authority, or the clamours of a deluded multitude? In short, how can we reasonably hope to steer our course, through the shoals, rocks, and whirlpools, that abound in this perilous ocean, without suffering great loss, though we should be marvellously preserved from shipwreck? Or how shall we shun one danger without risking another, perhaps more formidable?

It is indeed evident to every observing person, that the want of this accuracy and promptitude in distinguishing things that differ, exposes many persons to be seduced into various errors both in doctrine and practice, and renders their conduct unstable and their characters inconsistent. Such things may not form any impeachment of a man's sincerity: but they render him very uncomfortable to himself and to his friends; they weaken his influence and pervert his usefulness; they lead him to sanction error by his example, and, as it were, to give bad bills a currency by indorsing or accepting them; and often bring a reproach on the gospel itself. On the other hand, the man, who by patient investigation, in dependence on the teaching of the Holy Spirit, has formed an habit and acquired a facility in "proving all things, and holding fast that which is good," will proceed with steadiness and consistency through the various circumstances which occur in this changing world; he will be prepared to maintain the credit of his profession, and the tranquillity of his mind, in trying times: he will know how to attend with firmness to his own duties, even amidst persecutions, without incurring the disgrace or distress of "suffering as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters." He will learn either to suspend his opinion, or decidedly to express his disapprobation, when novel sentiments, or confident pretensions attract the public notice: for these commonly prove like glaring meteors; they succeed one another at certain intervals, and then fall into contempt and oblivion; though for the time they too generally meet with encouragement from many professors of religion, to the disgrace of the cause, and the great loss of those who turn aside after them.

The clause under consideration, however, may be considered according to the common translation of it; "that ye may approve things that are excellent." This has indeed been in a great measure anticipated, in the observations made on the increase of holy love: yet it may not be improper to subjoin some thoughts in this place, on cordial approbation of *things excellent* and abhorrence of *things that are evil*: without which the most exact out-

Digitized by Google

ward regularity of conduct is a mere form of godliness, or a pagan virtue.—"Hate the evil, and love the good," was the Lord's exhortation to Israel: "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good," is the apostolical message to Christians. Amos v. 15. Rom. xii. 9. This the spiritual law requires, and the nature of true repentance implies: without this state of the heart, sin will, in one form or other, maintain its dominion, and shortly reassume its ascendancy, notwithstanding terrors of conviction, ecstacies of devotion, or raptures of joy; nor can any man without it be "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

However unregenerate persons may amuse themselves with harangues on the beauty of virtue, it is manifest that they do not thus "approve things that are excellent," according to the scriptural standard of excellency: for if they did, they would not show a decided aversion to the character of those, whom God hath in every age honoured as the excellent of the earth; while they not only tolerate, but delight in, and lavish their encomiums on, such persons and actions "as God abhorreth." Yet it is self-evident, that the more a man delights in the good, and hates the evil, the nearer he must approach to the right frame of mind; the greater must be his measure of conformity to God; the better must he be prepared for serving him, and the more completely furnished for every good work.—The abhorrence of evil and the love of holiness must proportionably be attended with self-abasement, and humiliation for sin; with simplicity of dependence on the mercy and grace of God in Christ Jesus; with admiring views of his love and of the preciousness of his salvation: with modesty, meekness, gratitude, patience, and contentment; with watchfulness against the evil we hate, diligence in pursuing and practising the good we love, and delight even in a self-denying course of obedience: nor could we ever be proud of any attainments or performances, if we entirely abhorred the mixture of evil, which an acute spiritual discernment will perceive in all we do. It must, therefore, be a most important part of the Christian's growth in grace, to become more and more able readily to prove things that differ, to distinguish accurately between genuine excellency and all counterfeits; to separate exactly the good from the mixtures of evil blended with it: and cordially to love the good and to abhor the evil, which is found in characters, actions, or dispositions, whether ourselves or others are concerned.

IV. The next clause in this prayer, "that ye may be sincere," suggests to us another particular, in which the believer's growth in grace consists. There may be sincerity without genuine piety; but piety cannot subsist without sincerity. Prejudice, pride, carnal affections, or other corrupt principles, may so retain a man in ignorance, or pervert his judgment, that he may "verily think he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Christ;" and thus very sincerely fight against God. He cannot indeed be justly charged with *insincerity:* but that does not excuse his other crimes. He is not a humble, serious, and teachable inquirer after the truth, who seeks it diligently and impartially, as disposed to embrace and adhere to it wherever he finds it, or whatever it may cost him. On the contrary, he shuts his eyes against the light, and strives against his own convictions, when his prejudices, interests, or inclinations are concerned: and "*for this cause*, God sends" such men, "a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they might all be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. But to be sincere, in the scriptural sense, implies the profession of that religion, which God hath revealed to us; and must, therefore, differ very widely from sincerity in opposing his truths, precepts, and servants. It consists in *sincerely* reverencing and believing the doctrines of the gospel, embracing the salvation of Christ, and yielding ourselves to God, as willing to be taught and ruled by him: in *sincerely* seeking to know the truth, in boldly professing it, and endeavouring to live according to it; and in *sincerely* repenting of every sin, renouncing the world, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following our Lord, in the cheer-

Digitized by Google

ful obedience of faith and love. When he, who searcheth the heart, declares the professor to be "a Christian indeed, in whom there is no guile;" when his "love is without dissimulation, and he is actually as much disposed to every good work, as he desires to be thought; when he can say, without hesitation or ostentation, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;" when he is as careful to approve his secret conduct to God, as to maintain his credit before men, and dreads hypocrisy more than human censure; when mental discipline, and the government of his thoughts, form a part of his daily employment, and "Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit," a part of his secret and daily prayer; when he is not conscious of any reserves in his obedience, in favour of some darling passion, or against some self-denying duty: then a man is indeed a sound character, and shall never be put to shame. Let it not, however, be supposed, that a state of perfection is intended: the very man, of whom these things may justly be spoken, feels sin dwelling in him, warring against him, and mixing with all he does: he often goes mourning to the throne of grace, and with sighs and groans laments before God those defects and defilements, which no human eye witnesseth, and which numbers would scarcely consider as at all reprehensible. But he allows himself in no sin; he desires without exception to have all evil dispositions mortified; and no more *habitually* permits envy, malice, pride, avarice, or lust, to lodge as a welcome guest in his heart, than he commits gross crimes in his daily conduct.

With such a consciousness of integrity in his Christian profession, the apostle was supported under the various calumnies, and suspicions, to which he was subjected. "Our rejoicing," says he, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and *godly sincerity*, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world. 2 Cor. i. 12. This *godly sincerity* as much differs from *worldly sincerity*, as *godly sorrow* does from *worldly sorrow*: 2 Cor. vii. 10, it is in some degree essential to the character of a Christian; but it gathers strength, and acquires a more complete ascendancy, as he grows in grace; and with increasing knowledge, sensibility, and discernment, he perceives many things in his conduct and conversation not exactly consistent with it, which he carefully endeavours to rectify: for indeed the same words and actions which once formed no impeachment of his sincerity in professing the gospel, would prove him a hypocrite, should he persist in them, when "more fully instructed in the ways of the Lord."

The apostle before this had deemed the Philippians sincere believers: he was "confident that the Lord, who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Christ;—even as it was meet, that he should think this of them all:"—but he prayed that this holy sincerity might be permanently manifested, and more exactly regulate all their professions and conduct towards God and man: that in all their words and actions they might be preserved pure from every tincture of dissimulation and hypocrisy. And what believer will refuse to adopt this prayer for himself, and for all, whose growth in grace he especially desires? And who does not see, even among professors, whom it would be very wrong wholly to condemn, many grievous mixtures of insincerity, real or apparent, the effect of ignorance, warm passions, strong attachments or prejudices, inattention, a timid incapacity of giving a direct refusal, or the habit of exciting expectations by kind language and ambiguous expressions, without any real intention of answering them?

But the original word signifies *unmixed*, or purified from every thing that is debasing, like honey when thoroughly separated from the wax. It has, therefore, been thought, that the apostle referred to the simplicity of the consistent Christian, as contrasted with the conduct of such as attempt to serve God and mammon; and endeavour to unite the interests, pursuits, and pleasures of the world with those of religion, in defiance of our Lord's most solemn declaration, that it is impossible. When a man appears devout in the place of worship, on the Lord's day, or in pious company; but acts

Digitized by Google

like a mere worldly man in other circles, and on other occasions; when his religion falls almost wholly under human observation, and neither enters his closet, nor influences his conduct in his family, his dealings, or the use he makes of his time and talents; when he loves to dispute about the truth, but manifests no improvement of disposition from his attachment to it; when he makes one, almost as regularly at the places of diversion or dissipation, as at those of public worship; or when he is religious with reserves, and only by fits and starts; he exhibits a melancholy and affecting sight to every truly pious mind. But to this too common character we may contrast the professor of the gospel, who maintains a consistent conduct in all places and companies, under the habitual impression of this thought, "Thou God, seest me;" who "is in the fear of the Lord all the day long;" who conducts his most ordinary concerns on the highest principles; who aims to fulfil the duties of every relation "heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men;" who seeks to have every employment, possession, and comfort, "sanctified by the word of God and prayer;" who serves his Master in heaven, when engaged in his shop, in manual labour as a servant, and even in taking needful recreation; and endeavours to observe the apostle's direction, "Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Religion constitutes such a man's business, interest, and pleasure; and by assigning to every thing its proper place, proportioning his attention to every object according to its value and importance, and arranging his secular concerns in due subordination and subserviency to the one thing needful, he renders every part of his conduct an act of cheerful obedience to the God of his salvation. It is probable, that no mere man completely answers this description; but it certainly comprises the substance of various scriptural exhortations, and accords to the commands and example of our blessed Lord.—Growth in grace must, therefore, especially consist in a continual approximation to this state of mind and tenor of conduct; and the disparity between our actual attainments and this proficiency in religion, should increase our earnestness in pressing forward to the mark, for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

V. The apostle next adds, "that ye may be without offence till the day of Christ;" and we may from this clause deduce another particular, connected with the believer's growth in grace. The day of Christ, when he shall come to judgment, should be continually kept in view by all his disciples; and the Scripture constantly calls our attention to it. Without any inquiry into the times and seasons, which the Lord hath been pleased to conceal, we may certainly know that "the Judge is at the door;" death will speedily transmit each of us to the tribunal of God, and if we be preserved without offence till death, we shall be also till the day of Christ.

The word translated *offence* denotes any thing laid in a man's path, over which he may stumble and fall. Numbers "stumble at the word, being disobedient," and openly reject the gospel; some make a temporary profession, but "by and by they are *offended*, and in time of temptation fall away; and others prove an *offence* to their neighbours, by a conduct inconsistent with their avowed principles.—Should we suppose that St Paul meant to intimate to the Philippians, that they would do well to distrust themselves, though he had expressed a strong confidence respecting them, it might suggest an useful instruction; for the Christian who most grows in grace will be least disposed to rely on the favourable opinion of his brethren; knowing that they cannot discern the secrets of his heart; conscious of many inward evils that none suspect; and aware that brotherly love induces candour in judging others, and severity only towards ourselves. But the new convert, or declining professor, is apt to take vast encouragement from the good opinion of reputable professors, or eminent ministers: and it may seriously be apprehended that many rest their confidence entirely on such testimonies, and finally deceive themselves; because they deem it needless to regard the warnings of Scripture, or the remonstrances of their own consciences, and refuse

Digitized by Google

to "examine themselves whether they are in the faith," after having been approved by the disciples and ministers of Christ.

A man may stumble, however, who is not finally cast down. Judas alone fatally apostatized; but all the apostles were *offended*, when their Lord was delivered into the hands of sinful men. Many professors have stumbled, and fallen into grievous crimes, causing others to stumble also: and yet they have been renewed unto repentance, and finally saved. Whatever wise and holy reasons the Lord may have, in his unsearchable counsels, for permitting such things; his law, of "loving our neighbour as ourselves," is our rule of duty: and the believer, who understands and feels the genuine tendency of his principles, would, however assured of his own salvation, be ready to leave the world with groans and tears, on reflecting that his misconduct had emboldened the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; hardened some in impenitency; deceived others in an empty profession; exposed the gospel to profane ridicule and reproach, and overwhelmed the friends of truth with grief and discouragement.

Our path through life is interspersed with stumbling-blocks, which Satan hath placed there, by means of infidels, hypocrites, apostates, deceivers, and inconsistent professors.—It behoves us, therefore, "to watch and be sober;" yet, unless the Lord keep us, we shall watch in vain: so that while we walk circumspectly and cautiously, we should pray without ceasing, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;" and, while we carefully avoid every occasion of stumbling, we ought to use every precaution not to throw any stumbling-blocks in the way of our brethren. For this must be the consequence, if we imbibe, countenance, or propagate erroneous opinions; if we be drawn into any glaring indiscretion or inconsistency; if we yield to temptation in an unguarded hour; and even, if we do not carefully "avoid every appearance of evil."

Nothing surely can be more desirable to an heir of salvation, than to pass the time of his sojourning in humble fear and circumspection; that he may bring no reproach on the gospel while he lives, and leave a testimony to the excellency of his character, in the consciences of his survivors. Thus a man finally ratifies every thing he hath said and done to recommend the cause of Christ, during the whole course of his profession: "by well-doing, he puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men:" "being dead he yet speaketh," and the recollection of his holy conversation perpetuates, and stamps a value on his principles; when he can no longer endeavour to disseminate them.—In proportion to the degree of our genuine love to the Lord and his cause, the desire of thus living and dying must gain strength; and the consistent Christian, in his deliberate judgment, would prefer death with credit, to the most prosperous life, connected with becoming a disgrace to the gospel. This habitual disposition will render him more vigilant and circumspect, and especially more fervent in prayer, that he may be preserved "without offence until the day of Christ." On the contrary, when professors deem it a mark of proficiency, that they are freed from all concern about these things; when they really grow more lax in their conduct, and regardless what impressions it may make on others; it is evident that they are declining in grace, if not wholly destitute of divine life, whatever opinion they may form of themselves. The primitive churches were troubled with persons of this description, who deemed it a proof of their knowledge, and a part of their liberty, to disregard expediency or propriety in using their privileges; and to please themselves, whatever might be the consequence. Thus they became *an offence* to their weak brethren, not walking charitably towards them. The apostle, therefore, exhorted them to "follow those things which make for peace, and by which one may edify another:" he declared, that "if meat made his brother *offend*, he would eat no flesh while the world stood, lest he should make his brother to offend:" and he added, "Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ." But who can doubt, that Paul was more advanced in grace, than the Christians to whom he wrote? He was far more conformed to the mind that was in Christ, delivered from carnal self-love, inspired with

Digitized by Google

zeal for the glory of God, filled with love to his brethren, and desirous of the salvation of sinners, than they were. Hence we may indisputably conclude, that *growth in grace* consists greatly in an increasing circumspection respecting our conduct, that we may avoid every cause of offence laid in our way, and not prove an occasion of stumbling to others. And as our Lord has declared that "it is better for a man, that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should *offend one of the little ones* who believe in him,"—how greatly ought we to dread such misconduct, "as may prejudice numbers against the truth, and prove an occasion of their eternal ruin?" It is to be feared that few of us are wholly guiltless in this respect; and probably we shall find, on accurate self-examination, more cause for deep humiliation than we suspect.

But it would exceed the bounds assigned to this treatise, should the subject of *offences* be considered in a manner suitable to its importance: especially as another occasion will offer of resuming it. Yet, before we proceed further, it may be proper to call the reader's attention to that source of *scandals*, which our Lord hath especially selected, namely, *discords and contentions among his disciples*. Matt. xviii. Bitter controversies among professors of the gospel; mutual accusations, if not invectives, and slanders; appeals to the world *in print* of one party against another; and many other effects of pride, selfishness, and resentment, too common at this day, are not only deviations from the rules our Lord hath prescribed in this case, but diametrically opposite to them; and constitute offences of the most pernicious and lamentable kind. But growth in grace proportionably destroys the root of this bitterness, and renders men cautious not to disgrace the common cause, by an eagerness to vindicate their own characters, secure their own interests, or expose the crimes of their opponents. It renders them averse to controversy when it can be avoided; and when constrained to contend for the truth, it dictates candour, meekness, modesty, and benevolence, mortifies the desire of victory and applause, and inspires zeal for the honour of God and the salvation of souls. It is, therefore, evident, that this is one important part of growth in grace, though it be seldom duly valued and inculcated.

VI. The apostle concludes with these words, "That ye may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God:" and this evidently comprises another particular of great importance in this inquiry. The care, expense, and labour of planting, grafting, pruning, and tending the tree, have respect to the *fruit* expected from it; without which no man would be satisfied with its stately growth, redundant foliage, or beautiful blossoms. The whole plan of redemption, the humiliation and sufferings of the divine Saviour, the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the preached gospel, and the instituted ordinances, are entirely designed to render men fruitful in good works; and if this end be not answered in those who profess the gospel, the whole *as to them* has hitherto been ineffectual. "What could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes." Even the work of the Holy Spirit, in regenerating, illuminating, convincing, and comforting the soul, is entirely subservient to the Lord's design of rendering it holy and fruitful: nor is any knowledge, experience, faith, joy, or confidence, genuine, which is not connected with fruitfulness, or productive of it. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire,"

Whatever part of a believer's conduct tends to make known the glorious perfections and works of God, and to promote the credit of the gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the peace or purity of the church; whatever may diminish the sum total of ignorance, error, vice and misery in the world, or increase that of true knowledge, wisdom, holiness, and felicity; in short whatever does real good to mankind, in their temporal or spiritual concerns; is good fruit: all else should be counted but as leaves and blossoms. An upright, faithful, blameless, benevolent, peaceable, forgiving, pure, and holy

Digitized by Google

conversation; a cheerful, thankful, resigned, and patient spirit; a reverential, and stated attendance on the ordinances of public and family worship; a conscientious regard to the will of God, in our dealings with men, and in our behaviour towards all who are in any way related to us, even when they neglect their reciprocal duties; and an habitual moderation, in all the pursuits, interests and pleasures of life, have a manifest tendency thus to adorn our profession and benefit mankind. To these we may add a faithful improvement of the talents committed to our stewardship; whatever measure of authority, influence, abilities, learning, or riches, may be assigned to us by our common Master; for with such talents we may do proportionable good; provided we be influenced by evangelical principles, avail ourselves of advantages and opportunities, and ask wisdom of God to direct us in our endeavours. All those liberal acts of piety and charity, which Christians perform with that portion of their time, attention, or property, which others waste or abuse, are fruits of righteousness, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. And when we connect with these things, an holy boldness in professing the truth, and constancy, cheerfulness, and meekness in suffering for it; we have the general outlines of Christian fruitfulness.

The good ground "brought forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold." All believers are in some measure fruitful, when their principles have had time to produce the proper effect: but the apostle prayed for his beloved people, "that they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness." He earnestly desired, that they might produce all the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22, 23. in a degree fully adequate to their abilities and opportunities; that none of their talents might be buried or misemployed, nor any thing neglected, or left unattempted, by which they might glorify God and do good to men. We cannot think ourselves perfect *in this life*, without being justly chargeable with pride; nor can we neglect to pray for perfection and follow after it, without criminal negligence and toleration of sin in our hearts and lives.

Professors of the gospel too often resemble those trees, which must be very carefully examined, before it can be determined, whether they bear any fruit or no. But the apostle could not be satisfied with such ambiguous characters; he wished to see his people, like such fruit-trees as attract the notice and admiration of every traveller, while at one glance he sees all the branches loaded with the valuable produce.—It must then be manifest that the increase of fruitfulness is one essential branch of the believer's growth in grace; nay, indeed, that all the other particulars are principally important because of their subserviency to this grand object. This might be more copiously proved and illustrated, but it seems too obvious to require it. Our Lord declares, he had "chosen and ordained his apostles, that they should bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain;" and whoever duly considers the instruction conveyed by the parable of the vine and the branches, will be ready to conclude, that no man is a living branch of that true Vine, who does not bring forth more and more fruit, during his continuance in this world; and will at least determine, that when the reverse takes place, the professor's state and character become proportionably ambiguous.

We have now followed the apostle through the several petitions of this important prayer; intending to reserve the concluding words to be considered in the application of the subject. We shall therefore here close this division of the treatise with the words of the apostle to the same Philippians: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,—if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you." Phil. iv. 8, 9.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.

Containing some additional Observations on the nature and effects of Growth in Grace, as deducible from other Scriptures.

WHILE we attempt to inculcate those practical subjects, which have been enlarged on in the preceding part of this treatise, it may perhaps be feared lest we should draw men from the simplicity of dependence on free grace, by faith in the righteousness and atonement of the Divine Saviour. On this account, therefore, as well as for other reasons, it may be expedient to subjoin a few more particulars, in which growth in grace consists, and by which it may be ascertained both in respect of its reality and degree.

I. Genuine growth in grace is always accompanied with proportionable *humiliation*, and the habitual exercise of repentance. This hath indeed been implied and intimated in every part of our progress: but it is a matter of that importance, and creates such difficulty to many persons, that a more explicit consideration of it seems necessary. True grace consists in illumination, sensibility, submission, and spirituality; and, as these increase by progressive sanctification, deeper humiliation must be produced. Clearer and more distinct views of the divine Majesty and greatness must proportionably abate our self-importance, and render us little, and, as it were, nothing in our own eyes. Fuller discoveries of the holiness, justice, mercy, and truth of God, and of the glory and beauty of his harmonious perfections as displayed in the person of Christ, must show us more and more the intrinsic evil of sin, and the heinousness of our own transgressions; and the same defects or defilements must give us proportionably greater uneasiness, than they did when we had less sensibility and spirituality. Thus self-abhorrence, on account of present sinfulness, must increase with our growth in holiness. The habit also of comparing every part of our temper and conduct with the perfect law of God and the example of Christ, instead of judging ourselves by other rules, tends to bring us more acquainted with the hidden evils of our hearts, and the unsuspected sins of our lives; as well as to show the imperfection of our duties. That intimate communion with God, which accompanies growth in grace, must make us more sensible of our sinfulness; and even the company of the most pious Christians tends to abate our self-confidence, to cover us with shame, and to excite us to renewed exercises of deep repentance, from the consciousness that we fall far beneath them in many parts of our character and behaviour. Every discovery of the glory of redemption by the cross of Christ, and of the immensity of our general and particular obligations to his love, tend to make us dissatisfied with our present measure of devoted obedience, and to humble us under the consciousness of multiplied instances of ingratitude to our Benefactor. So that, while there is any alloy of sin in the heart of a regenerate person, his self-abhorrence and humiliation before God for it must bear proportion to the degree of his actual proficiency in holiness. No proof *that a sinner has become pure in heart* is so unequivocal, as his groans and tears on account of his remaining pollution, while it appears less and less in his external conduct; yet this often occasions dejection, when not attended with a clear understanding of that sanctifying work, by which the Holy Spirit seals believers to the day of redemption; and would always produce this effect, were it not for the discoveries made to the soul, of the entire freeness and inexhaustible riches of divine grace to all that flee for refuge to the hope set before them.—Thus, when holy Paul abounded in grace, and was fruitful in good works, probably above any man on earth; he was more humbled before God than others, not only for his former rebellions as "the chief of sinners;" but also in respect of his present disposition and services, "less than the least of all saints."—Nor is it necessary to refer to the well known ex-

Digitized by Google

amples of Job, Isaiah, Daniel, or the centurion whom our Lord commended: their actual attainments and unaffected humility are well known to all who diligently consider the subject.

This increase of humility never fails to produce a proportionable disposition to condescension, courteousness, and modesty; a willingness to take the lowest place, "in honour preferring others to ourselves;" and a satisfaction of mind in obscure stations, or with ordinary services, if they be allotted to us. The believer gradually acquires such a view of himself and his misconduct during a succession of years, that he "remembers and is confounded, and never opens his mouth any more for his shame, when the Lord is pacified to him for all that he hath done." Ezek. xvi. 63. This cures him of his propensity to boast, revile, censure, and complain; and produces lowliness, meekness, candour, resignation, contentment and gratitude, in the habitual frame of his temper, and tenor of his conduct.—If then any person's supposed growth in other respects, be accompanied with evident pride, ambition, ostentation, contention, arrogance, boasting, and bitterness; we must conclude his apparent graces to be counterfeits, and not the real fruits of the Spirit: for "this wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish." Indeed, unless such proficiency be accompanied with an evident increase in tenderness, modesty, and gentleness; with a readiness to submit to conviction, and to be very sorry for every fault; and with a disposition to be more and more resigned under contempt and neglect; a man's growth in grace cannot be clearly ascertained. "Be ye clothed with humility," is an exhortation to the most arduous attempt and the most exalted attainment, to which man is capable of aspiring. Pride is the most offensive to God of all sins: a proud holiness is therefore self-contradictory; for no grace can subsist except by connection with humility; and the idea, that exhortations to Christian tempers and evangelical fruitfulness tend to render men proud, arises from an entire misapprehension concerning the very nature of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

It is indeed true, that the exercise of grace, or diligence in duty, may prove an occasion of pride to a believer: and so may the knowledge of evangelical truth, or even the exercise of self-abasement and contrition in any remarkable degree. But then true grace continually counteracts these emotions; and the *root* of pride is gradually weakened, even by means of these rank but unallowed *buddings:* as "Hezekiah was humbled for the pride of his heart." The vigorous exercise, therefore, of *holy* affections must eventually produce deep humiliation; whereas gifts, high and false affections, lifeless notions, ostentatious services, and an unholy zeal for evangelical truth, not only allow the branches of pride to shoot forth luxuriantly, but water and nourish the root of that hateful propensity.

II. The increase of *faith,* in all its varied exercises, is an essential part of growth in grace, and inseparably connected with all the rest. This has hitherto been taken for granted: but it may be useful to give the subject a more particular consideration. If we define faith to be "belief of the truth," or "a disposition to credit implicitly the testimony of God in his word;" we may easily perceive that all true religion begins and increases with it. Unless we thus believe the testimony of God, we can neither fear his wrath, "as revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," regard his warnings, nor understand the nature and value of his salvation:—we can neither accept of his invitations, rely on his promises, give up present objects for better things in reversion, nor render the willing obedience of grateful love. It is impossible therefore to be saved without faith; because we shall certainly neglect the great salvation revealed in Scripture, if we do not believe the record of God concerning it.—It is also manifest, that the more fully we are acquainted with revealed truths, and the more firmly we believe them, without vain reasonings or sceptical hesitations; and the more entirely we realize to our minds the awful and affecting scenes thus presented to our view; the greater degree of every holy affection, the more

Digitized by Google

decided victory over the love of the world and the dread of the cross; the deeper compassion for perishing sinners, and the firmer attachment to the cause and people of God, will be produced. Faith at first works by fear and hope, and afterwards by love: the increase of faith therefore must increase the energy of these active principles, and of every affection dependent on them.

On the other hand, growth in grace strengthens faith, and habituates the soul to a realizing contemplation of invisible objects, to a deep sense of their importance and of our intimate concern in them, and to a decided preference of eternal things above all the interests of this transient scene.—Thus the believer faints not while "he looks not to the things which are seen, but to the things which are not seen." He learns, with Abraham, to part with objects which nature most endears to him, when the will of God requires them; believing him able to make up every loss; and, with Moses, he is enabled to count "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world, and the afflictions of God's people, preferable to the momentary pleasures of sin, enduring as one who sees him that is invisible."

If we consider faith as including the idea of dependence, or committing ourselves to the Lord's hands, in credence and confidence; the increase of it is inseparable from growth in grace. The convinced sinner discovers, perhaps gradually, that he has no resources in himself, and possesses no ability of escaping the wrath to come: but, hearing of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and of the encouragements and promises of the new covenant, he applies for the grace of his free salvation, and submits to give God all the glory. As his views enlarge, he more expressly intrusts his soul and all his eternal interests into the hands of Christ, according to the nature of his redemption, and the offices he sustains; and expects the supply of all his wants from his unsearchable riches. Thus he learns "to live by the faith of the Son of God," and as consciously deserving of wrath alone, to expect every blessing as the purchase of his blood and the gift of his grace. He has not as yet, however, obtained a very deep acquaintance with the intrinsic evil of sin, the aggravations of his own iniquities, the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, or his own helpless and exposed condition: so that, attending diligently on every means of grace, he hopes speedily to rise superior to every temptation, and to *feel himself* advancing in holiness every day; and in this he commonly experiences a mortifying disappointment, even when actually growing in grace. For he continually discovers evil in his heart and duties, which he did not at all suspect, and has painful experience of his own weakness and folly. Many a sharp conflict and conscious relapse into evil tend to convince him that "he can do nothing of himself;" and he escapes well if he be not so baffled by temptation, as to act inconsistently in some degree before men, whilst the Lord "humbles him, and proves him, and shews him what is in his heart, to do him good at the latter end." Deut. viii. 2. In this way, however, after a course of years, when he has really grown in grace, and is justly regarded as an established, honourable, and fruitful Christian; he is so far from feeling less need of supplies from the Saviour's fulness, that he depends on him more simply and explicitly for every thing, than he did at his first acceptance of his salvation. He more entirely "counts all but loss, that he may win Christ and be found in him, and in his righteousness;" and continually seeks forgiveness of his daily sins, and the acceptance of his daily services, by faith in his blood. He now considers the inclination, ability, and opportunity, of doing good works, as so many gifts from the God of grace, increasing more and more his obligations to him; and is deeply conscious, that he hath not duly improved his talents: so that he has great cause to be humbled on account of his unfaithfulness, but none to be proud of those things which never were his own: he is also entirely sensible, that he cannot perform any good work in future, or withstand the temptations which obstruct his progress, without supplies of wisdom and strength day by day, out of that same fulness, from which he has so long been accustomed to

Digitized by Google

receive. Thus his growth in grace is connected with proportionable simplicity in the exercise of faith: while our Lord plainly declares, that the habitual simplicity and energy of faith in him, secures the growth of grace in all other particulars, when he says, "He that abideth in me, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

The consistent believer learns always to consider every object, that surrounds him, in its relation to the providence, the moral government, or the salvation of God; and this induces a constant dependence on him, even in the common affairs of life. He "acknowledges God in all his ways:" he relies on him to incline the hearts of those with whom he is concerned to act properly towards him; Neh. i. 11. to succeed his undertakings, to protect him in danger, to supply his wants, and to comfort and deliver him in trouble. He depends on the perfections and providence of God to fulfil his promises in these respects, as far as conducive to his good; being assured that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his Father's notice and design. He considers the power of God as engaged to restrain the malice and rage of Satan, to moderate his trials, and to preserve him from circumstances of overwhelming temptation; as well as his grace to strengthen holy affections and give energy for resistance. Thus he passes through one difficulty after another; conscious of his weakness, but relying on the Lord for strength and protection; he casts his care on him, and "in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, makes his requests known to God:" while his experience of the Lord's faithfulness and attention to his prayers tend to increase his faith, and encourage the confidence of his dependence, without anxious alarms or distrustful solicitudes. And this prepares him for at length passing through the valley of the shadow of death "without fearing any evil;" hoping that the Lord will then be with him, as his guide, guard, and comforter, and at last receive him to his eternal glory.

The increase of faith in this respect must be a most important part of growth in grace, as it produces a calm, submissive spirit in the most perilous and distressing seasons; when the hearts of unbelievers, and even of the weak in faith, "are shaken like the trees by the wind:" it induces an habitual intercourse, in the spirit of adoption, between the redeemed sinner and his reconciled God and Father; as he now walks with God in humble confidence, and reverential fear: it secures a man from seeking relief in trouble by indirect means, and renders him watchful against every thing that would interrupt his communion with God, by which his present comfort and hopes of future felicity are principally maintained. And, on the other hand, as he grows in grace he will attain to greater simplicity of dependence on God, which will render him less dependent on men and on second causes; he will be less affected by the fluctuating appearances of external affairs, "his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord;" and will more uniformly consider all creatures as his instruments of judgment or of mercy, of correction or of comfort; and remember that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Thus it appears, that growth in grace, as to the various particulars comprised in the Apostle's prayer for the Philippians, will certainly be accompanied with deeper humility, stronger faith, and more entire reliance on God in all things pertaining to this life, and to that which is to come.

It cannot therefore, be doubtful, in what a believer's growth in grace consists. When a man abounds more and more in all the varied exercises of holy love; when this love is directed and regulated by increasing knowledge, wisdom, and judgment: when he acquires by exercise, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the habit of prudently examining and accurately distinguishing between things that differ, abhorring the evil, and cleaving to the good more entirely and heartily from day to day: when he grows more known and approved for sincerity and integrity in all his professions and engagements, and more singly devoted to God, as he advances in years; when

Digitized by Google

mes more and more circumspect in his words and works, that he may inadvertently fall himself, or cause others to stumble; and more fervent prayer to be preserved from bringing any reproach on the gospel, to the end of his course: when he grows more abundantly fruitful in the works of righteousness; while at the same time he lies lower before God, in deep humility, and is more willing than ever to be abased among men; when he acts more and more habitually with the invisible God and the eternal world before his mind; and relies more entirely on the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who thus becomes more precious to his soul: and when his dependence on the providence of God is more uniform, and accompanied with greater composure, submission and constancy in the path of duty; when this is the case, nothing material to the Christian character seems wanting; the various holy dispositions and affections, resulting from regeneration, are advancing to maturity in just proportion and coincidence; and the believer is evidently ripening for the work, worship, and joy of heaven. We might easily branch out the subject more diffusely; but it is presumed, the attentive reader will perceive, that nothing can be selected as another distinct part of growth in grace, which is not fairly reducible to some of the particulars that have been recapitulated.

CONCLUSION.

The apostle having prayed that the Philippians "might be filled with the fruits of righteousness," subjoined, according to the uniform language of the New Testament, "which are through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." Our fruitfulness is utterly insufficient to justify our persons, or recommend us to the Divine favour; and we are not allowed to court the applause of men, in the performance of our good works: but when they are considered as "the fruits of the Spirit," produced by his sacred influence on the hearts of fallen creatures; as the happy effects of the incarnation and redemption of Christ; as presented through his intercession, being as it were sprinkled with his blood; and as conducive in all respects to the manifestation of the glory of God in the salvation of sinners; we shall readily perceive that they must be well pleasing in his sight. We are thus consecrated "an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ;" and "hereby he is glorified, when we bring forth much fruit."—This consideration leads us to inquire more particularly into the reasons which induced the apostle to pray thus for his people; and on what account that growth in grace, which hath been described, is so greatly to be desired.

It is observable that we have met with no petition for prosperity, deliverance from persecutors, or even spiritual consolation. Indeed it is not proper to pray unreservedly for any temporal comforts in behalf of ourselves or others; for they are of so ambiguous a nature, that we cannot tell whether they would prove blessings or not: though John wishes his beloved Gaius may "be in health, and prosper, even as his soul prospered!" A singular example! and a petition that must be reversed to suit the case of many professed Christians! No doubt Paul did pray that his people might be delivered from "the tribulations and persecutions which they endured:" and that their hearts might be *comforted*, being knit together in love:" but when he expressly set himself to point out the things which he principally requested in their behalf, in order to direct them in seeking the best blessings for themselves, he was silent on these topics: knowing that he needed not to remind them to ask for temporal deliverances or inward consolations, (if they indeed prayed at all;) and that these latter would certainly follow, if they obtained the blessings which he especially desired for them. We may therefore observe,

Digitized by Google

1. That growth in grace is necessary in order to the believer's abiding consolation, and assurance of hope. It may probably have occurred to the reader, that assurance of an interest in Christ, and of everlasting life through Him, has not been expressly mentioned as essential to growth in grace or strength of faith: but as we are exhorted "to give all diligence to make our calling and election *sure*;" and "that we may possess the full *assurance* of hope unto the end:" we may therefore consider genuine confidence as the *effect* of increasing faith and sanctification, 2 Pet. i. 10. Heb. vi. 10—12. Without a measure of holiness there can be no warranted comfort or *assurance of hope*. Strong cordials, indeed, given to a man in a high fever, may produce a transient exhilaration while they increase the disease: but proper medicines tend to restore health, which will be accompanied with more pleasing sensations, and of a more permanent nature.—Now sin is the distemper of the soul; and while pride, malice, lust, covetousness, or any other vile passion, prevails in the heart; no salutary comfort can be derived from the promises or privileges of the gospel, except as they allure a man from his present seducing and destructive pursuits, by showing him that far greater blessings are attainable. But when a humble, meek, pure and heavenly disposition is produced; when knowledge, love, submission, and spirituality diffuse their benign influence, subjugating every corrupt passion, and moderating every attachment to earthly objects,—the believer consequently feels peace and comfort: while the joys which on some occasions fill and transport the soul in an extraordinary manner, are chiefly reserved for times of sharp conflict, heavy trials, or hard services.

All our genuine consolations spring from the influences of the Holy Spirit, opening to us the treasures of redeeming love, applying to our consciences the blood of sprinkling, exciting holy affections in our hearts, and giving us earnests of heavenly felicity. They are therefore inseparably connected with the exercise of repentance, faith, love, hope, and gratitude; while every kind or degree of sin, even in our tempers or desires, grieves and quenches the Spirit of God, and interrupts our comforts; till renewed humiliation, and application for mercy through the blood of Christ, restore our peace. It must therefore be evident, that growth in grace is inseparably connected with established peace, hope, and joy in God; a "peace of God which passeth understanding;" a "joy unspeakable and glorious." We ought to value these consolations above all the riches and pleasures of the world, and desire the abundant enjoyment of them from day to day: but we should not expect or allow ourselves to wish for it, except through the medium of increasing sanctification and fruitfulness. Upon the most mature deliberation, the prudent Christian will not hesitate to pray that the loss of wonted consolations may chastise his folly, if he grow lukewarm, careless, or worldly: and that, if the only wise God see that withholding present comfort will promote his growth in grace, he may be sanctified and not comforted, rather than comforted and not sanctified. Present joys are of short continuance, but increasing holiness is the recovery of health, and the preparation for future and eternal felicity. Our Lord hath commanded us to "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and then "all other things will be added to us;" but numbers by inverting this order come short of salvation, and soon lose their idolized worldly objects. In like manner, many professors of the gospel are so eager to obtain assurance, that they seek it in the *first* place; instead of first seeking to grow in grace and to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, leaving it to the Lord to give them comforts, and to cause them to "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost," to his appointed time and way; and thus many are boistered up in vain confidence, or amused with delusive joys: and others continue feeble, sickly, and dejected, during the greatest part of their lives. Various methods have indeed been devised to afford them relief and consolation; but they have merely a transient effect: for the child that does not grow, is not healthy, and being unhealthy, will be uncomfortable, whatever may be done to cheer its spirits by cordials, to feast it with delicacies, or to amuse it by toys and finery.

Digitized by Google

2. Growth in grace is most desirable, in order that the Lord Jesus may be glorified in us, and by us.—When Christ appeared on earth, all those who saw the persons that he had restored to the use of their senses and limbs, recovered to health, or raised from the dead, would have reason to exclaim with astonishment, "See what Jesus of Nazareth hath done! how wonderful is his power! how great his love! how many, how stupendous, how beneficent his miracles!"—While the monuments of his divine compassion and authority over all nature would be ready to say to all around them, "He whom the rulers and scribes despise and seek to destroy, restored my limbs, my understanding, or my life."—Thus would he be honoured by them, and in them.

When they, who profess the doctrines of the gospel, and avouch Christ to be their God and Saviour, make it evident in a manner equally incontestible, that their tempers are sanctified, their lusts mortified, their selfish hearts enlarged, and their character sound, pure, and holy: all who knew them before, will be constrained to notice the change, to wonder at the effects, and to inquire into the cause,—"What hath transformed the brier into a myrtle, the lion into a lamb, or the swine into a sheep?"—while the persons who have experienced this change, by professing their faith in Christ, give him all the glory; and thus the nature and tendency of the gospel, and the excellency of its fruits, are manifested; the Lord, as it were, challenges men to come and examine the work he hath wrought, and to say, whether it be not worthy of admiration and honour? This is the best method of confuting infidelity, and constraining iniquity to stop her mouth; and the fruits of righteousness which believers produce, prove, "through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God," as they tend to make known his glorious perfections, and promote the cause of his holy religion among mankind.

But "woe be to the world because of offences;" and "woe be to him by whom the offence cometh!" The crimes of professed Christians render our holy religion odious and contemptible to millions in all the quarters of the globe; and give infidels their most plausible arguments against it. The crimes of hypocrites, who contend for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, prejudice the minds of multitudes in every part of this land: and, alas! the misconduct of true believers, who do not feel sufficiently the necessity of growing in grace, produce in a measure the same lamentable effects. We ought therefore to pray more for ourselves and each other, that the Lord, who hath set us apart for himself, would make us to be "unto him for a name, and a praise;" "that our conversation may be such as becometh the gospel of Christ;" "that we may walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory;" and that we may put those to shame and silence, "who would speak against us as evil-doers."

The apostle instructs Titus to exhort servants to be "obedient to their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*" And the same argument is equally cogent in respect of every holy disposition and instance of good behaviour, in those who profess the gospel. Nothing indeed can add to the beauty and glory of divine truth, as it is in its own nature; but this can only be discerned by the spiritual mind; to the world in general it appears foolish and absurd, and the misconduct of professors confirms despisers in their proud contempt of it. But there is an excellency in a truly Christian temper and conversation, which they are not hardy enough to deny, and of which they frequently have the fullest demonstration, in the advantage or comfort they derive from it.

One noisy, imprudent, and inconsistent zealot for evangelical doctrines, who neither knows nor practises the duties of his station, but is habitually guilty of manifest crimes or glaring improprieties, will expose the truth to the contempt of a whole family, village, or neighbourhood. A single Christian, matured in grace, according to the sketch here given, notwithstanding

Digitized by Google

incidental failures and manifold infirmities, of which he is humbly conscious, will obtain a testimony in the consciences of all his connections, and win upon their hearts; he will soften the prejudices, silence the reproaches, and live down the contempt of the circle in which he moves; and evangelical truth will acquire such a respectability in a neighbourhood, where consistent Christians are numerous, as none can properly conceive, who have not actually witnessed it.—Every observer, however, knows, that superficial disputers about doctrines, misbehaving themselves in families and neighbourhoods, furnish numbers with a *plausible* objection to the gospel; and that the prudent, kind, and circumspect believer often checks the progress of opposition, and disposes his relatives and acquaintance to judge more favourably of the truth.

3. This must be allowed to have a powerful tendency to make known the salvation of Christ. All that love the gospel desire to spread it: but many attempt it in a very improper manner, thinking that they ought to dispute for the truth with every body to whom they have access, and that at all events they must become preachers of the word. No doubt it is very commendable to contend earnestly for the truth; and what zealous Christian does not pray, that the Lord would increase an hundred fold the faithful ministers of the gospel, how many soever they be?—But perhaps the cause of truth would be no loser, if we had much less disputing, and even rather less preaching *of some kinds*, provided we had more of those, who preach to all around them in the silent energy of an holy life; after the manner in which Peter exhorts wives to preach to their unbelieving husbands. 1 Peter iii. 1—7. Every word that persons of this character drop, whether of serious reproof and exhortation, or in ordinary discourse, and every persuasion to read a book, or hear a sermon, would have great weight, and in some instances success: whilst, "Physician heal thyself," is a sufficient answer to the most zealous unholy professor.—Nay, it may reasonably be supposed, that a faithful minister of very slender talents, who lives consistently with the holy doctrine he delivers, and is attended by a few persons, whose conduct do credit to the gospel, will be more solidly and durably useful, than the most popular speaker, who is either lax in his own conduct, or surrounded by admirers who are a reproach to his doctrine.

It pleases God on some occasions, to revive religion by numerous apparent conversions, and in a very rapid manner: yet this will soon die away, and continue at most only for a single generation, if holiness do not shine in the lives of professors. But more commonly the cause of God diffuses its influence like the leaven, and like the grain of mustard-seed, almost insensibly from small beginnings to a great increase. When the work is genuine, and the profession accords to the specimens given in the New Testament, the holy flame kindles from heart to heart, in families and neighbourhoods; and one after another is won over, even without the word, by the conversation of friends and relatives, while they behold and benefit by their consistent conduct. This we should desire and pray for in our several circles; and would we know the right method of succeeding in it, we must "let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our heavenly Father."

4. It is also most desirable, that the knowledge of the gospel should be continued to our posterity. Holy men of God have always paid a great regard to the religious interests of succeeding generations; and with this view redoubled their diligent and zealous endeavours, when they were about to leave the world.—Thus Moses, Joshua, David, Paul and Peter, had the same mind in them, which was also in Christ Jesus. The true believer longs especially, that his children and children's children, with those of his relatives and friends, may from generation to generation be the supports and ornaments of the gospel. In condescending regard to such desires, the Lord hath mentioned these blessings in the covenant he makes with us, assuring us that it is intended "for our good, and for that of our children after us;" yet

Digitized by Google

none, but such Christians as have been described, can reasonably expect to be thus favoured. Their example and instructions, their testimony for God and his truth, living and dying; and the reputation they often acquire after death, however slighted before, plead powerfully in behalf of religion, in the consciences of those whom they leave behind. As they have honoured God, he will thus honour them by answering their prayers and prospering their endeavours: and if they leave any of their children or beloved relatives in an unconverted state, they may even at their departure possess a peaceful hope, that the Lord will yet think upon them for good, and at length gather them into his fold, perhaps by means of their dying exhortations. In general, however, it is certain that Christianity of this kind is not easily or speedily eradicated: the fruit produced by such believers, as has here been imperfectly described, will remain in its effects, from generation to generation; and indeed, in one respect or another, to the end of the world, and to all eternity. "All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him," saith the Lord concerning Abraham; "for I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment: *that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*" Gen. xviii. 18, 19.

5. Growth in grace is peculiarly desirable, in order that we may possess an assured hope and strong consolation at the approach of death. This last enemy is indeed the king of terrors, in his original nature and consequences: and though he is disarmed of his sting, when he approaches as a friend to release the believer from his uneasy situation in this evil world, and convey him to his Father's house, yet our nature is apt to recoil; and when faith and hope waver, we cannot but look forward to the solemn season with trembling anxiety. Indeed, were we sure of having one day of spiritual light and comfort, and no more, during our continuance on earth, it would be very desirable to reserve that cordial for the last season of conflict. But a loose and slothful conduct, even if gross sins are avoided, prepares distress for the closing scene; and the Christian who habitually yields to indolence, or, in other words, does not grow in grace, makes, as it were, an assignation with terror to meet him on his death-bed. While, on the other hand, evangelical principles, a "conversation becoming our profession," and diligence in our proper work and in the great business of religion, constitute an habitual and actual preparation for that solemn scene. Our loins are thus girded, our lamps burning, and we are like men waiting for the coming of their Lord. We may not indeed before-hand be able wholly to discard our apprehensions; nor ought we to perplex ourselves on that account: but we are indisputably safe; and at whatever time or manner we may be summoned hence, that day will not overtake us as a thief, with terrible surprise or fatal consequences, but we shall be graciously addressed in these most condescending words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

It would be wholly superfluous to speak particularly concerning the day of judgment in this inquiry; but we may very properly close it with the apostle's words to the Philippians, "Be blameless and harmless, as the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; among whom *shine ye* as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life: that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Phil. ii. 15, 16.

If the things we have considered, be indeed the principles of the gospel reduced to practice, and accord to their genuine tendency, what an excellent religion is Christianity! how base must they be, who oppose, insult, and reproach it, for the faults of many of its professors! and how inexcusable are those persons who give them such an occasion!—It is indeed a most palpable falsehood to pretend that the doctrines of grace diminish our obligations to obedience, or supersede the necessity of good works: but the holy lives of those who embrace them is the best, and in fact, the only effectual confuta-

Digitized by Google

tion of this slander.—If then the advantages and consequences of growth in grace be so important, and the nature of it so evident, little need be said concerning the way in which we ought to seek so great and desirable a blessing. The motives and encouragements of the gospel are abundantly sufficient to animate those who duly attend to them: we have free access to the throne of grace; exceedingly great and precious promises to plead with our merciful God and Father; and an inexhaustible fulness from which to draw all things "pertaining to life and godliness." We are directed and commanded to "ask and receive, that our joy may be full:" God hath appointed various means, which he hath engaged to render effectual to all those who diligently attend on them in humble faith; and every person may soon learn for himself, if he duly watch, and keep his own heart, what employments or companions prove helps or hindrances to his soul, in this grand concern. Could we therefore succeed in convincing men that it is possible, even in this world, to arrive at degrees of spirituality, fruitfulness, and stability, far beyond what is commonly attained: that it is their bounden duty to "press forward—forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are before:" that they have great cause for deep humiliation, on account of their unfruitfulness in times past, and yet ought not to be discouraged from expecting more effectual help in their future endeavours: if, I say, men could be thus induced, heartily to set themselves to seek and pray for more abundant growth in grace, as the most important and desirable of all blessings: there can be no doubt, but they would make greater progress than they generally do. Yet it should also be observed, that Christians would not therefore become better satisfied with themselves, or their attainments; perhaps, through self-acquaintance, tenderness of conscience, and deep humility, they might not be sensible of making any advances in grace; but assuredly they will more and more hunger and thirst after righteousness, till they come to the fountain above, when they shall drink, and thirst no more for ever. But to such persons the words of the apostle are peculiarly suitable and encouraging. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. xv. 58. "Now, the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE DOCTRINES

OF

ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,

STATED FROM SCRIPTURE,

AND SHEWN CONSISTENT WITH EXHORTATORY AND PRACTICAL PREACHING AND CONDUCIVE TO HOLINESS OF LIFE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE LOCK CHAPEL,

NOVEMBER 26, 1786.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

THE Sermon, originally published under this title, was written on a very particular occasion, and in too great haste for the difficulty and importance of the subject. The author's mind likewise was agitated at the time, by the circumstances in which he was placed: yet, amidst these disadvantages, it was deemed necessary to print it *verbatim* as preached, except as some notes were added.

When therefore the occasion which required the publication was passed, and the second Edition, which had been called for in a few days, was disposed of, he dropped all thoughts of reprinting it: deeming it too *personal*, and *too much adapted to special circumstances*, to answer the permanent purposes of a calm, deliberate, matured, and impartial treatise on the deep and mysterious subject.

He finds, however, that the Sermon is frequently inquired for: and this has made him apprehensive lest the circumstance of its being out of print should be considered as a dereliction of his principles. He has, therefore, at length, determined to publish another edition: but in doing this, while he adheres strictly to the *arrangement* and *sentiments* of the original Sermon, he deems himself at liberty to omit some things *personal* or *occasional*, to revise the style, and to make several additions and alterations, in order to render it something more adequate to the ends proposed by the publication.

The reader will perceive, that the principal difference betwixt the statement here given of the doctrines in question, and that of many modern Calvinists, relates to Redemption by the death of Christ, as being of *infinite sufficiency*, and therefore in some respects, the *common benefit of mankind*. This view of the subject makes not the least difference, in respect of the entire freeness of salvation by the sovereign purpose and grace of God, made known in the effectual calling of his chosen remnant: while it gives the preacher an immense advantage in fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation, and yields the awakened sinner the greatest encouragement in applying to Christ for salvation. On this ground we may say to any human being, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." But, on the other plan, no sinner can know, previously to conversion, whether he has any more right to rely on the merits and mediation of Christ, than fallen angels have.

The Author earnestly desires the candid inquirer after truth, and all who dare to think for themselves, to examine the passages quoted from Scripture in this Sermon, and to observe accurately whether they do not fully establish his statement. Then let them weigh all the other testimonies of holy writ with the same design; and finally let them consider what immense pains and ingenuity it requires, to explain a variety of texts in consistency with the other scheme; with what confidence and plausibility opponents urge them

Digitized by Google

against our doctrine; and yet how naturally they coincide with the view here given. To the author they give no trouble; they express his sentiments, and in similar circumstances he should use the same language. The statement here given, is by no means *new* or *peculiar*. He has proved that the compilers of our liturgy held the same sentiments. Many of his brethren at present coincide with him. The most eminent Calvinist divines in North America, who have lived during the present century, view the subject in the same light; and abundance of testimonies of this kind, from every quarter, might easily be adduced: but let the word of God decide.

The author is not anxious about the class of professed Christians among whom his brethren may rank him. No one of them is either right or wrong in every thing; and that which in one situation is disgraceful, in another is deemed honourable. But it appears to him of great consequence to show, that these despised doctrines are scriptural, rational, holy, consolatory, and consistent with every other part of Christianity: and that the objections commonly urged against them, originate in misapprehension of their nature and tendency: and may generally be traced back to distorted views given of them, or scandalous perversions made of them.

In some few places, however, the terms *Calvinist* and *Calvinism*, *Arminian* and *Arminianism* are retained; not as invidious distinctions, but for convenience, and to prevent circumlocution. It is a great mistake to suppose, that self-righteous pride is peculiar to Arminians, or Antinomian laxity to Calvinists. Pride and dislike to the holy law of God are alike congenial to our fallen nature: so that every man is radically of himself both self-righteous and Antinomian. No creed, as such, will cure either of these distempers; but regeneration renders us *convalescent*. Yet even true Christians frequently hold and contend for doctrines, which very inadequately influence their own hearts and lives; nay, they often maintain errors, without being proportionably injured by them. Hence many Calvinists are prone to pride and self-preference, and many Arminians evidently humble. But the Christian temper, wherever found, even though a man express himself, as we think inaccurately, is vastly more valuable than the most exact notions without "the mind which was in Christ Jesus."—On the other hand, the Arminian is not at all secured from Antinomianism, nor the Calvinist exposed to it, by their several tenets; seeing both of them are *Antinomian* just as far as they are *unsanctified*, and no further: "because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Perhaps speculating Antinomians abound most among persons professing to be Calvinists: but Antinomians whose sentiments influence their practice, swarm among such as are really Arminians. Does the reader doubt this? Let him ask any of those multitudes, who openly trample on God's commandments, what they think of predestination and election, and he will speedily be convinced, that they are Arminians: yet they take occasion from their notions concerning the mercy of God, to encourage themselves in impenitent wickedness. It would, therefore, be unspeakably better for all parties to examine such subjects with impartiality, meekness, and brotherly love; than reciprocally to censure, despise, and condemn one another.

May 2, 1798.

Digitized by Google

SERMON, &c.

JOHN VI. 37—40.

All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

THE holy Scriptures, being the word of God, are doubtless perfectly consistent. Moses and Samuel, David and Isaiah, Paul and James, being merely the penmen of the Holy Spirit, must perfectly harmonize in the truths which they inculcate. Precepts, threatenings, warnings, judgments, counsels, exhortations, invitations, promises, privileges, histories, examples, types, and parables, in divers methods, subserve the same great ends of instruction. They all display and illustrate the same character of God, and of man; and impress the same ideas of sin and of holiness, of time and of eternity, of happiness and of misery. They all concur in displaying the glory of the divine perfections in the dispensations of Providence in this world, and the final distribution of rewards and punishments in the world to come. And though these constituent parts of holy writ do not in all respects answer the same purposes, each has its distinct important use in the accomplishment of one vast and uniform design.

But though the Scriptures are in themselves completely harmonious, yet men do not readily perceive this harmony. Many imagine they see in them numerous inconsistencies and contradictions: others, judging it impracticable to reconcile the sacred writers, give a partial preference to one above another, and set them in opposition to each other, according to their several opinions. The various sects and parties professing Christianity, appeal to Scripture in proof of their discordant tenets; and multitudes, content with those passages which seem to speak the language of the favourite system, pass over all the rest as if nothing to the purpose, or nothing to them; a mere *caput mortuum** in divinity.

These things are notorious; but whence do they arise? We allow that the vastness of the design revealed in Scripture, which has relation to things

* The worthless insipid mass that remains when the spirits are all drawn off by distillation; or the *mere dross* left in refining metals.

Digitized by Google

unseen and eternal, and to the perfections of the incomprehensible God, must very far exceed the capacity of our narrow minds, and cannot enter the understanding at once, nor be apprehended at one glance; and, when viewed in parts, the unity is broken and the harmony obscured: insomuch that we may justly question, whether any creature can perfectly comprehend the consistency of the glorious plan, which "angels desire to look into."—But other reasons concur in producing this discordancy of sentiment. The Bible is a revelation from God to *sinners*; and it seems an apparent intention of the Holy Spirit, so to arrange and constitute this revelation, as to make trial of men's hearts: and to distinguish betwixt the humble teachable inquirer after the way of salvation, and those who read the Scriptures with captious self-sufficiency in order to start objections; with attachment to a party for weapons of angry controversy; or with a worldly and sensual mind to find excuse for their sins. "The *way-faring* men, though fools, shall not err therein." "But the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness." "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for *this cause* God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." * "Unto you," saith our Lord to his inquiring disciples, "it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables; that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." † My brethren, let us pray for an humble teachable spirit, which will avail us far more in understanding the Scriptures to the good of our own souls, than all the acuteness and learning in the world. In proportion as we possess this temper, and really love truth and holiness, we shall escape these dangers, and more and more perceive the consistency of the word of God.

But as this disposition is imperfect, and counteracted by remaining prejudice and corruption, in the best of men; so none of us perceive all that consistency which really subsists in divine revelation. A satisfactory discovery, however, of the harmony of Scripture, is doubtless a good test of the degree in which we really understand divine things; and, ever since the Bible became my peculiar study, this discovery has been my invariable object. No arguments could procure my assent even to the doctrine of *Justification by faith in Christ alone;* until I was satisfied of its perfect agreement with the honour of the divine law, and the indispensable necessity of personal holiness, and fruitfulness in good works, which I was sure were every where insisted on in the sacred volume. In like manner, my objections to the doctrines of *personal election and final perseverance* were insuperable, till I was fully satisfied of their consistency, with exhortations, warnings, invitations, and persuasions, on the minister's part; and with diligence, watchfulness, and strenuous exertions, on that of the people; which are far more spoken of in Scripture than even these doctrines themselves. At that time I was almost entirely ignorant of the sentiments of *modern Calvinists:* and I am not sensible that any material alteration has since taken place in my views of these doctrines, by all I have seen, or heard, or read.

What those views are, I feel myself called upon more fully to declare from the pulpit and the press; that is, I consider it my duty at present to lay before you and the public, the substance of the doctrine I have preached, and probably shall preach, as long as the providence of God continues me among you. I say *probably;* for I trust I am open to conviction and desirous of instruction; and possibly some person may point out erroneous and unscriptural tenets in this statement of my sentiments. And whether he do it publicly or privately, as a friend or as an enemy, provided he convinces my judgment that I have been mistaken, he shall certainly have my thanks and acknowledgments for so doing.

* 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. † Isaiah vi. 9, 10. Matt. xiii. 13—15. Mark iv. 11, 12. Luke viii. 9, 10. John vii. 39, 41. Acts xxviii. 25—27.

Digitized by Google

I have in this view chosen a very copious text: but I neither intend to enter particularly into the *minutiæ* of explanation, nor to confine myself closely to it; but, according to a very simple plan and method, to advert to a variety of other Scriptures as we proceed with the subject. I shall therefore take occasion from the text to observe:—

I. That Christ came down from heaven to execute the Father's commission.

II. That this commission hath a special reference to those whom the Father hath given him.

III. That all these, and none else, will come to Christ.

IV. That he will most certainly receive all that do come to him.

V. That his commission extends to the infallible and everlasting salvation of the body and soul of every one, who is thus given to him and comes to him; or who sees him, believes in him, and depends on him for salvation.

VI. That all these observations are perfectly consistent with many things which some professed Calvinists object to as Arminianism: and this will naturally lead me to close with a brief application.—And may God the Spirit open all our understandings and hearts to understand this truth; and bless this design to the edification and establishment of many souls; and the promoting of true godliness within us, among us, and around us.

I. "Christ came down from heaven to execute the Father's commission." "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."—It might have been supposed that this expression, "I came down from heaven," would create considerable difficulty to such as look upon Christ as a mere man, who never was in heaven before his ascension: but criticism, in the hands of an ingenious man, is a magic wand, and nothing can stand before it! It is, however, greatly to be wished, that these modes of interpretation had been conceded, as a kind of monoply, to the Socinians, and had never disgraced the writings of those who call Jesus their "Lord and God," and who profess to trust in him alone for salvation. Oh! when will men show due reverence to the oracles of God, and suppose that the Holy Spirit dictates proper language, which needs not be tortured from its plain meaning, in the cause of truth, whatever the interest of a party may require?

But let this hint suffice: we are, I trust, otherwise minded as to the divinity of Christ. We profess at least to believe, that "being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God: *nevertheless* he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man." Originally he was no servant, and therefore no creature: for all holy creatures must be the servants of God: but he condescended to assume that character along with human nature. In this character he acted on earth, and doth and will act in heaven till the day of judgment, by *commission*, and *according to instructions*. He came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him; in which he not only is our Saviour, but "hath left us an example that we should follow his steps."

We must not, however, suppose that there is any opposition betwixt the will of the Father, and that of the Son. He appeared on earth as Man; and by such language he intimated that he acted not by human partiality, but according to the counsel of God. It is likewise an accommodation to our infirmities, and serves to obviate our misapprehensions.

But what is the general purport of this commission? Let us hear the word of God: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of *all* acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."—"His blood is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." John i. 29, iii. 16—20. 1 Tim. i. 15, ii. 5, 6. Had the penmen of the Scriptures been as scrupulously careful to prevent even

Digitized by Google

the appearance of deviating from exact systematical consistency, as many moderns are, they would never have thus expressed themselves.—For my part I dare not use any of the above-mentioned arts of criticism, to narrow the obvious sense of these and similar texts: and as I hope this day, previously to receiving and administering the Lord's Supper, to use the following terms in solemn prayer, Christ "by his own oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world;" * I would no more contradict this solemn profession from the pulpit, than I would preach against the seventeenth article respecting predestination.—The compilers of our Liturgy evidently thought both true, and consistent with each other; and I am happy to coincide in sentiment with these venerable characters. † It will appear that none but the elect can eventually be benefited by the death of Christ; yet there is a sense, of vast importance, in which it may be properly said, and the Holy Spirit hath expressly said, that "his blood is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

The principal, though not the only object of Christ's appearing in human nature, and living so many years a holy sufferer, and dying in unknown agonies on the cross, was to "bring in everlasting righteousness, and to make propitiation for iniquity;" as preparatory to his mediatory office in heaven, and his intercession for sinners. The perfection of his arduous obedience, and the intenseness of his complicated sufferings, were doubtless of indispensable necessity, and of vast efficacy, in this plan of redemption: yet it was the union of the *Deity* with the Man Christ Jesus, in one mysterious person, which stamped its full value on this sacrifice for sin. But can any man, who believes the *real Deity* of Christ, hesitate to pronounce it an *infinite ransom*? Infinite honour was given to the divine law by his obedience, and infinite satisfaction made to divine justice by his atoning sacrifice. ‡ And through this

* 1. "I learn, to believe in God the Father, who hath made me and all the world."
2. "In God the Son, who hath redeemed me and *all mankind*."
3. "In God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and *all the elect people of God*." (Church Catechism.)
Here *Election* is supposed to be connected immediately with *sanctification*, not with *redemption*; and this appears to me most evidently the scriptural way of stating the subject; though it differs in some measure from many Calvinist creeds and systems.
"Christ was crucified to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men." (2d Article.)
"The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual." (31st Article.)
Hence it appears, that this was the *deliberate judgment* of our venerable reformers: and that it is the *standard doctrine* of our established church.

† It is very well worthy of observation, that the Liturgy of the Church of England, though compiled by known Calvinists, is most pointedly opposite to every degree and species of Antinomianism. The conclusion of the general Thanksgiving, a great part of the Litany, and innumerable other passages, might be adduced in illustration of this remark. But the Collect for the day, when this Sermon was preached, is so directly apposite to the subject, that I shall insert a part of it.—"Stir up, O Lord, we beseech thee, the *wills* of thy faithful people, that they, *plenteously* bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be *plenteously* rewarded."—It hath been much wondered how Socinians, Arians, or Arminians, can subscribe our articles, or use our Liturgy: and it must be at least equally surprising, if any Antinomians can do either the one or the other.

‡ Even Calvin himself writes thus: "He," (the apostle) 'maketh it the common grace of all men, because it is proposed to all, not because it is actually extended to all. For although Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world; and is *offered* indiscriminately to all men by the goodness of God; yet all do not apprehend him." (Hom. v. 15.) And again, "Christ suffered *sufficiently* for the whole world: but *efficaciously* only for the elect" (1 John ii. 2.)—Indeed, if human authority availeth any thing, it would be easy to adduce abundant evidence from the most respectable Calvinist divines.
To this it is objected, that it does not consist with the *justice of God* that any should perish for whom Christ died. It is allowed that Christ in dying for sinners *intended* to save none but those who eventually shall be saved. In respect of this *intention*, he says, "his blood was shed for many for the remission of sins:" and "he gave his life a ransom for *many*." Yet in paying this ransom, there was not barely a sufficient atonement made for them, but as it were a redundancy of merit sufficient even for the sins of all men: and in respect of this *sufficiency*, he is said to "give himself a ransom for *all*;" and to be "a propitiation for the sins of the *whole* world." Peter, therefore, scruples not to speak of those "who deny the Lord that *bought them*, and bring upon themselves swift destruction;" and Paul of "destroying those for whom Christ died." It might be expected that systematical expositors would find out other interpretations of all these testimonies; but the question is, whether their interpretations are natural and obvious, and such as they would deem admissable in different circumstances.
The idea of Christ paying *exactly so much for one*, and *so much for another*, and so much for each; and then adding the sums together, and forming a large *limited* sum, just sufficient to ransom the elect, appears unscriptural, and gives a degrading view of the glorious subject. An *all-sufficient* atonement was made at once, and an immeasurable fulness of mercy and grace is treasured up in Christ to be communicated, according to the eternal purpose and counsel of God. Every believer receives from this fulness; others remain under condemnation, not through defect of merit in Christ, but through their own impenitency and unbelief.

Digitized by Google

infinite sufficiency, that hindrance, which arose from the perfect holiness and righteousness of God, and the inconceivable demerit of sin, is once for all entirely removed; so that it would be no impeachment of the purity of the divine character, no deduction from the honour of the law, and no abatement of the horror and hatred which we ought to conceive against sin; should God through Christ pardon all the sinners who now live, or who ever shall live, on earth.

In love that surpasseth knowledge, the Redeemer, having executed this part of his commission, arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, there in glory at the Father's right hand to complete the grand design; and hath all power and authority in heaven and earth, and all the fulness of the spirit, at his disposal for that purpose: and this design consists in pardoning, sanctifying, defending, and bringing to perfect holiness and felicity, all without exception, who come to God through him. But this leads us to show:—

II. That Christ's commission has a special reference to those whom the Father hath given to him.

Though no obstacle from divine justice to the salvation of any sinner, or of every sinner, now remains; yet a hindrance equally insuperable, except by omnipotent grace, is found in the depravity of our fallen nature. The sun is created, and placed in the open firmament, for the common benefit of mankind; there is in that luminary no defect of light, nor would there be any, were innumerable additional millions to share the benefit. Yet some men do not see; not from any defect in the sun, but from one in themselves. God, who is no debtor to his creatures, gives the blessing of sight to whom he will: but if he withhold or withdraw it, the man is benighted at noonday.

Christ was lifted up upon the cross (like the brazen serpent on the pole,) and is held forth in the preached gospel, for "all the ends of the earth to look unto, and be saved." This may properly be called the *common benefit of mankind:* there is no defect of merit, of mercy, or of grace in him; nor would there be any, if millions, as numerous as the sand, should receive out of his fulness. But the want of a right *disposition of heart*, which fallen man has not, which God alone can give, but which he may justly withhold from a rebellious subject, effectually prevents the salvation of all who do not receive it. The case is parallel: except that bodily blindness is not generally in any sense a man's fault, or a defect in his moral character; whereas the want of humility, spirituality, and love of God, is *sin, original sin,* the fruitful parent of all other sins, in fallen men and fallen angels.

Let the blessings of the Gospel be fairly proposed, with solemn warnings and pressing invitations, to two men of exactly the same character and disposition: if they were left to themselves, in entirely similar circumstances, the effect must be precisely the same. But, behold! while one proudly scorns and resents the gracious offer; the other trembles, weeps, prays, repents, believes! "Who maketh this man to differ from the other? or what hath he that he hath not received?" The scriptural answer to this question, when properly understood, decides the whole controversy. Human depravity produces different effects in vast variety, and gathers strength by habit; but, in its root and nature, it is the same and equal in all men. This can be effectually overcome by nothing except a new creation, a "work wrought by the exceeding greatness of that mighty power, which raised Christ from the dead." I do not now argue with such as oppose the doctrine of original sin.

It would not have consisted with divine justice to have saved sinners without an atonement; as it appears from the apostle's reasoning; (Rom. iii. 25, 26;) otherwise perhaps we should have been rash in asserting it. But where is it written, that God cannot consistently with justice condemn any unbeliever: or that he is in *justice* bound to give faith to any man, because of the ransom Christ paid? Doubtless he will fulfil his whole counsel, and save all whom he intended to save. But previously to faith in Christ, no sinner hath any claim upon his offended Sovereign: afterwards the divine faithfulness and mercy are his sole and sufficient security; and it seems to be a deduction of human reasoning, not any doctrine of divine Revelation, to assert, that even a believer can in *strict justice* claim eternal salvation on the account of Christ's atonement.

Digitized by Google

In the case before stated, the man who proudly scorned and resented the offer of free salvation from merited perdition, had this work been wrought in his heart by the energy of the Holy Ghost, he would certainly have embraced it; and had the other, who believed, been left to himself, he would as certainly have rejected it. This distinguishing grace is previously neither *deserved* nor *desired* by either of them: it might justly have been withheld from both; but it is graciously communicated to one, and not to the other, by a sovereign God, "according to the counsel of his own will." He and he alone, "hath made one to differ from another." Now, was this distinction *intentionally* made by the sovereign Disposer of all things, or was it not? If *intentionally*, was that *intention first conceived at the moment of execution, or previously?* If *previously*, why not from eternity? Indeed, if any of the works of God, when actually accomplished, be righteous, holy, wise, good, and faithful; the eternal purpose of performing them must have been equally righteous, holy, wise, good, and faithful: unless it can be *wrong to determine to do right*: because that determination was formed long before it was executed! If it consists with divine justice and goodness to leave one sinner to perish, and to save another equally guilty by an act of sovereign grace and power; it must have been equally consistent with justice and goodness to *decree* the destruction of the one, and the salvation of the other. In short, the two doctrines, that of "man's *entire depravity*," and that of a *new creation unto holiness* by the sole energy of the Holy Spirit, without any help, and notwithstanding every hindrance from nature, can never consistently be separated from that of *personal election*: nor upon this ground can a satisfactory reason be given, why any are saved and sanctified, but this,—that "God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we *should* be holy, and without blame before him in love! having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will; to the praise of the glory of his grace; wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins." Eph. i. 4—7.

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." In his unsearchable judgments, (Oh, how deep are they!) doubtless for wise and righteous purposes, though not clearly discernible by us purblind mortals, he was pleased to permit the first entrance of sin, the fall of Adam, and the depravation of the human race. It suits not my present limits to descant on this subject: I may scarcely pause to drop a tear for the awful catastrophe. But that man is fallen and depraved, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," all we see, hear, read, or experience, demonstrates, and all confirms the testimony of God, in Scripture, to this humbling doctrine. Utterly destitute of love to the holy character of God, desire of his favour, delight in his service, gratitude for his benefits, or regard to his glory, man is universally disposed to inordinate idolatrous self-love, and love of worldly objects. His own honour and glory he seeks, his own imagined excellencies he admires, his crimes he vindicates or excuses; he affects to be at his own disposal, wishes to be independently his own master, and would have all others admire and honour him, as much as he does himself. At the same time he also idolizes worldly objects: "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," he chooses as his portion. These are his good things for which he most ardently thirsts, on which he chiefly depends, and in which he places his highest felicity. Hence eventually proceed all unrighteousness, licentiousness, and ungodliness, according to the different constitutional propensities, educations, and habits of different men. "The law of God is weak through the flesh," and cannot restrain their impetuous desires. In the pursuit of their self-exalting or carnal projects, the will and worship of God are neglected, the rules of justice, truth, and benevolence violated, and every excess committed. But "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and eternal punishment is annexed to the transgression of this holy law, by him "to whom

Digitized by Google

vengeance belongs:" and when this is made known to the proud rebel, his neglect and contempt break forth in enmity against the holy character, perfect law, and righteous judgment of God; "because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; so then, they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God."

This state of the human race God foresaw; and he, who alone is competent to estimate the tendency of such a temper of heart, and the malignity of such a conduct, evidently considered all men both as meriting eternal misery, and as "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction."

Redemption by the blood of Christ was a most distinguished part of his original plan. He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Whatever other method God in his infinite wisdom could have devised, for his own glory in the salvation of sinners, this was doubtless the best; for it was actually chosen. But this plan could have no foundation except in the humiliating truth; that all men were so exceedingly guilty and deserving of everlasting misery, that it would have been derogatory to the justice and holiness of God, to have been reconciled to any of them, or to have rescued any of them from destruction, except through the interposition of such a sacrifice, as that of "his well beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." If man does not deserve damnation, deliverance from it is "not of grace but of debt." * And though eternal life must in strict propriety of language be an unmerited gift of God to any of his creatures; yet, as far as we know, it might have been honourably given to us; had not man been so guilty and God so holy, that without the atonement made by the death of the divine Saviour, it would not have consisted with his holiness to save so vile a rebel. If this be not so, "then Christ is dead in vain."

But if the proud, carnal, ungodly heart of sinful man is enmity to a holy God, and disdains the authority, dislikes the precept, and abhors the sentence of that holy law which condemns him to eternal punishment for his crimes; if the Gospel shows the malignity of sin, and the desert of every sinner, in the most conspicuous light; if it maintains the authority, magnifies the precept, and vindicates the justice of the sentence of the law; and if it gives no quarter to any sin, saves no man in his sins but from all sin, and to all that very holiness which the law demands, "writing the law in the heart;" could it be reasonably supposed, that man would not also hate and quarrel with the affronting, though most merciful, message of free salvation? It might have been previously expected, and matter of fact indisputably proves, that the unadulterated Gospel, notwithstanding its surprising largeness and freeness of grace and love, is more offensive to the proud rebel, than the very law itself, and excites more enmity and blasphemy. Nor need we hesitate to assert, that every individual, left to himself, would as infallibly have either neglected and opposed, or perverted and abused, the Gospel, as he has broken and quarrelled with the law. From this source especially have arisen all the persecutions of Christianity, which in many ages and places have raged; all the indifference and contempt which have prevailed; and all the innumerable corruptions of Christianity which have been devised, to render it more palatable or tolerable, to the pride or to the lusts of men.

Foreseeing this as the inevitable consequence of leaving the Gospel to take its own course in the world; knowing that he would reject it, or pervert it to their deeper condemnation; the Lord did not consider himself bound *in justice* to afford such obstinate enemies any further grace, but judged that he might *righteously* have left them all to the consequences of their perverseness. He is no man's debtor, he doeth no man injustice, he punisheth no man who hath not deserved it, nor any one above his deservings; and,

* If we could not by other arguments prove the justice of God in the damnation of sinners, the method of Redemption would alone demonstrate it. And it is more our interest, and more becoming us, to submit to his righteousness, and apply for his mercy, than, in the midst of our ignorance and blindness, to spend our time in vain reasonings upon a subject, for which we are incompetent; and in making objections to those appointments, which are unalterably determined, whether we submit to them or no.

Digitized by Google

however men may now dare to find fault, all his dealings will be shown most glorious in wisdom, holiness, truth, and love! and "every mouth will be stopped" in "the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds."

But where none has any claim, may not the great Ruler of the universe bestow his unmerited favours on whom he will? Is he alone restricted from "doing what he will with his own?" Seeing that none either deserve or desire mercy in *his appointed way;* but all harden themselves in impenitent and obstinate rebellion; in high sovereignty he declares, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."—"Therefore he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Not but that all who are saved, do run and seek; and "every one that seeketh findeth:" but God's mercy takes the lead; his preventing grace hath produced this willingness; and therefore the sinner wills, runs, seeks, and finds: whilst others, left to themselves, and to their own lusts, and to Satan's temptations, meet with those things in the righteous providence of God, which harden them more and more to their destruction. *

Doubtless the Lord acts with the most perfect wisdom, in making this difference among sinners: but he deigns not to inform us of his reasons; and who are we, worms, rebels, and enemies, that we should expect it from him!

When, therefore, he appointed his beloved Son, ("his Elect whom he had chosen") for salvation to the ends of the earth; that his grace might not be frustrated by man's perverseness, as otherwise it must have been; while he saw good to leave others under the condemnation of the law, and through the tendency of their evil nature to reject the Gospel, "from the beginning he chose" a people unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he calls them by the Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thes. ii. 11—14. These are the persons spoken of in the text, as "given unto Christ" by some mysterious transaction, (according to our low apprehensions,) betwixt the Father and the Son, when he undertook the work of redemption.† With an especial intention of saving this "remnant according to the election of grace," Christ shed his precious blood. "I lay down," says he, "my life for the sheep." His death was a *sufficient* atonement for *all:* this forms an encouragement for any; and leaves every one without excuse who neglects such great salvation, through pride and love of sin. But he foresaw who would eventually partake of this infinite ransom, and for them he specially paid it. These are *his* even before their conversion: "Other sheep," says he, "I *have*, which are not "of this fold:" meaning the unconverted Gentiles. When as lost sheep they are wandering in the ways of destruction, he providentially sends his ministers to those places, where each of them resides, that by them he may seek and save them, and bring them home to his fold:—and notwithstanding opposition from others, and their own discouragement and purposes of removal, he continues them in their stations till his purposes are accomplished. "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; *for I have much people in this city,*" Acts xviii.

* "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to *faith and calling* upon God. Wherefore we have no strength to do good works pleasant and acceptable unto God, without the grace of God by Christ *preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working in us when we have that good will.*" (10th Article.)
"*Work* out your own salvation with fear and trembling; *for* it is God which *worketh* in you to *will* and *do*, of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 12, 13.)

† "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which he endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." (17th Article.)

Digitized by Google

9, 10. saith he to persecuted Paul at Corinth, concerning the licentious inhabitants. And for these he especially intercedes, and not for the world. "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ—For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Ephes. ii. 1—10. Thus he separates his elect by new-creating grace, and makes them "a willing people in the day of his power, in the beauties of holiness." "We ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared; not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."—"He hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2 Tim. i. 9. Tit. iii. 2—9. Others are invited, but these only are *made willing to come;* the rest make light of it, and go their ways to other more favourite pursuits. This leads me,

III. To observe, that all these shall come to Christ, and none else will.

This is illustrated by the decree of Cyrus to the captive Jews. Ezra i. "Who is there among you, of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem." This was *general for all.* But many had got comfortable settlements at Babylon: and they did not care enough for the ashes of the holy city, or for the interests of religion, to encounter the perils and hardships of such an expedition. Who then eventually availed themselves of the king's unlimited permission? "All they whose spirit God had raised to go," and none else. The others might and could, had they possessed *a willing mind;* but they did not, and therefore they went not. Nor would any have gone, had not God interposed *to make some of them willing.* *

May not sinners come to Christ? How runs the proclamation? "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." Prov. i. 22, 23.—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat: yea, come buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him: and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah lv. 1—3, 6, 7. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." "We beseech you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain." 2 Cor. v. 17—21, vi. 1. "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever *will*, let him take of the water of life freely." Rev. xxii. 17. Who is expected, by name or character, in these general proclamations?—Christ complains of men, that "*they will* not come to him that they might have life; and he thus pathetically laments over Jerusalem, "How often *would* I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not!*" Jehovah says with the greatest solemnity and earnestness: "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"—Justice indeed demands the execution of the criminal; but the merciful Prince, as it were, sheds tears, whilst, as a matter of necessity, (if he will maintain the honour of his kingdom) he signs the death-warrant. The reason of the destruction

* I refer the reader to a letter of Archbishop Usher's, for a more full discussion of this point; and for this and several other illustrations and arguments.

Digitized by Google

of sinners is therefore thus stated, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." Prov. i. 24—33.

But sinners *cannot* obey the call. This is a truth if truly understood. They are under a *moral*, not a *natural inability*. Is this distinction useless and unintelligible? Is there no difference betwixt a covetous wretch, who with a full purse hath *no heart;* and a compassionate man who hath *no money*, to relieve a fellow-creature in distress? Both are effectually prevented, but the one *from himself, the other by an external hindrance.* Every generous man at once indignantly condemns the one, and wholly justifies the other. When the case is put, divested of all false colouring, the one *could if he would, and the other would if he could.* It is said of God that he "cannot lie." But whence arises this impossibility? Surely not from external restraint, but from the perfection of his essential holiness. Satan cannot but hate his Maker. Not because of outward force put upon him, but through the horrid malignity of his disposition. *

Sinners cannot be *willing* to stoop so low, and to leave so much, as the gospel requires; they cannot be willing to part with every lust, to renounce the world and deny themselves, to take up their cross and follow Christ; and without this *willingness* they cannot be his disciples. This is the real and the only hindrance. Were they once willing, they would ask, and God would give them all the rest.

Do they not come because these blessings were not intended for them? No man out of hell can possibly know this respecting himself: and very few indeed habitually think it. God's secret purposes and open declarations perfectly coincide: but "secret things belong unto the Lord our God, and the things which are revealed to us:" (a distinction not sufficiently attended

* If there be no real difference betwixt the *want of natural faculties*, and the *want of moral dispositions*, there can be nothing culpable even in Satan's opposing God, and endeavouring the destruction of men; for it is as impossible at least that he should do otherwise, as that sinners should perfectly obey the law, or of themselves repent and believe the gospel; and if they are excusable, Satan is consequently so too. Indeed, on this supposition, all characters are reduced to a level; for in proportion to the degree of evil disposition, or *moral inability* to good, evil actions become excusable; and by parity of reasoning, in proportion to the degree of moral excellency of disposition, or of *moral inability* to evil, good actions being unavoidable, become less praise-worthy. Thus, the more inwardly holy any man is, the less esteem is his piety, justice, and charity entitled to; for he *can* scarcely do otherwise. An angel, as confirmed in holiness, is still less entitled to commendation; for in *some sense* it is impossible he should do otherwise than be holy. He *cannot* sin. And through *necessary* excellency of nature it is strictly impossible that God should do any thing inconsistent with the most consummate wisdom, justice, truth, and goodness. He *cannot:* and, shall we say, this inability (which is the incommunicable glory of his nature) renders him less entitled to our admiring, adoring, grateful love, than otherwise he would be?

Every one must see what confusion would be introduced into civil and domestic concerns, if no regard were paid to this distinction, and an inveterate propensity were allowed as an excuse for crimes: and it introduces equal perplexity into all our discourses on divine things; because it runs directly counter to all our rules of judging characters and actions. A good outward action without the *least corresponding disposition*, is in reality *mere hypocrisy:* as the disposition to good and aversion to evil increase, good actions have more *genuine sincerity*, and the character more amiableness. When we can say with the apostles, "We *cannot* but do" so and so—we are entitled to as much esteem and approbation as mere men can be. This *moral inability* to evil is much stronger in angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect; and therefore we are taught to look forward to such a holy state and temper as the summit of our wishes and desires: and God himself, who, being under no restraint, but doing his whole pleasure, cannot but be perfectly and unchangeably holy, is proposed as the object of supreme love, admiring gratitude, and adoring praise.

On the other hand, a bad action, if done without *intention*, or the least disposition to such moral evil, is deemed purely accidental, and not culpable. When it is contrary to a man's general disposition and character, and the effect of *sudden temptation*, it is considered as more venial than when the effect of a rooted disposition; and for a criminal to plead, "I am so propense to theft and cruelty, that I *could not* help it," would be to condemn himself as the vilest miscreant, not fit to live, in the opinions of judge, jury, and spectators.

There can be no difficulty in proving, that this distinction is implied throughout the Bible, and has its foundation in the nature of things; and so far from being novel, it is impossible that a rational creature can be unacquainted with it. No man ever yet *missed the distinction between the sick servant who could not work, and the lazy servant who had no heart to his work;* that is, *betwixt natural and moral inability;* and no man could govern even his domestics in a proper manner, without continually adverting to it.

"But," say some, "human nature now must be laid low, and grace exalted." Now we ask, Which lays human nature lowest? To rank man among the brutes, who have no *power*, or among fallen spirits who have no *disposition*, to love and serve God? Or which most exalts grace? To save a wretch who could not help those crimes for which he is condemned to hell: or to save a rebel, who was *willingly* an enemy to his Maker, and persisted in that *enmity*, till almighty power, by a new creation, overcame his obstinacy, and made him willing to be reconciled?

Digitized by Google

to :) the former are not, and cannot be, the rule of our conduct: but the latter are; and these exclude none, but such as *will not come* to the gospel-feast. Matt. xxii. 3. Luke xiv. 18.—Esau sold his birth-right for one morsel of meat. Now in fact the Lord did not intend that birth-right for Esau, but for Jacob: but this not being the *motive* of Esau's conduct, formed no excuse for it. He is condemned in Scripture as profane, a despiser of his birth-right, and an example of one who repented not till it was too late; and he is proposed as a warning to us, not to despise or pervert the mercy of God, lest our doom should be irreversibly determined. Heb. xii. 17. Proud contempt of free salvation, idolatrous love of earthly objects, and profane disregard for spiritual blessings, are the real motives of men's rejecting the gospel; and therefore no unknown purpose of God is allowed as an excuse. It is true, the elect were of the same disposition, and, had they been left to themselves, would have made the same choice: thus "boasting is excluded," and God appears glorious in justice in condemning sinners, but more glorious in grace in saving believers.

"No man can come to me," saith our Lord, in the discourse from which our text is taken, "except the Father which hath sent me *draw* him."—"They shall be all *taught of God*; every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me." We are here informed, how this otherwise insurmountable hindrance is removed. Men are *drawn* by rational inducements, not *forced* by external violence; and this drawing is effected by the communication, not of new faculties, but of new dispositions and discoveries, which give a new direction to the judgment, desires, and affections. They are "taught of God," and "learn of the Father," who both opens the eyes of their understanding, takes the veil from their heart, and causes his light to shine upon them, and within them. Frequently after long patience with them, and preserving them during their ungodly course of life; in some cases, when they are grown more determined in wickedness than ever, and it might be supposed they were nigh unto destruction; by his Holy Spirit he shows them his glorious majesty and holiness, their relations and obligations to him, and the authority, extent, and reasonableness of his law. Thus he "convinces them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" and lays open the eternal world to their view in all its tremendous importance; till, alarmed at their danger, they tremble at his work, and take warning "to flee from the wrath to come." Their terror is accompanied by humiliation and penitent remorse, when the Holy Spirit teaches them the odious nature and dreadful tendency of sin, and the vileness of their own conduct and character: and then every kind and degree of reformation and amendment, prove utterly insufficient to appease their disquieted consciences. While others, after awakenings, take shelter in this refuge of lies, they are taught to exclaim, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags." Thus by despair of atoning for the past, or justifying themselves before a holy God, by such unholy services, they are made cordially willing to accept of gratuitous salvation.

They discover, likewise, that personal holiness is absolutely necessary; and are taught that "the Lord can have no pleasure in iniquity;" and that none can be meet for a holy heaven, and the enjoyment of a holy God, without conformity to his holiness. Thus they are preserved from that fatal refuge of lies, into which the love of sin betrays vast numbers, of perverting the doctrines of grace into a reason for being satisfied in the neglect of holiness. At the same time they are taught of God their own utter inability to obtain this holiness, except from him; and they learn to prize "sanctification by the Spirit," as highly as redemption by the blood of Christ. When such important concerns engross their minds, worldly objects seem diminished, and they learn to despise them, and to count them as nothing in comparison of the salvation of their souls. Thus they become willing to deny themselves, to forsake all, and to follow Christ, bearing their cross: whilst others perish in the vain attempt to serve God and mammon, and to reconcile the interests of time and eternity

Digitized by Google

his manner the hindrances, arising from the pride and carnal passions heart, being efficaciously removed, men readily learn under God their er, the grand lesson, without which all others would be useless, and to all else are subordinate. We must mention one thing before another; but it is not necessary to determine in what order these instructions are communicated, or whether more speedily, or more gradually. But, in his own time and manner, the divine Spirit will teach every elect person the nature, truth, and glory of the gospel of Christ; and show him, that in the divine Saviour, in his righteousness, sacrifice, intercession, and grace, all he wants, or can desire, is contained: "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." John xvi. 14, 15. Now the sinner feels an ardent longing for an interest in Christ and all his blessings, and fears nothing so much as being rejected. Now he makes, trembling perhaps, his earnest application. "Behold he prayeth!" As a condemned criminal, a perishing sinner, he comes, he applies, he waits: he persists in waiting and praying, and, giving up every other hope, he says, "Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Now he respects every instruction, observes every direction, uses every means, watches against every sin, attends to every duty; yet trusts in nothing but the free mercy of God through the redemption of his Son, whom he desires "to be made unto him Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." Now he is very apt to suspect that his mode of application is not right; and becomes jealous of himself lest he should be deceived. And, though he longs for relief from the burden of his guilt, yet he fears losing even his distress improperly, and still seeks for more earnestness and deeper humiliation. He will take no denial, yield to no discouragement, and be satisfied with nothing short of all that Christ died to purchase, and is exalted to bestow; pardon, righteousness, holiness, liberty, victory, and eternal life. Thus all, whom the Father hath given unto Christ, being taught and drawn of God, come unto him, receive him, and walk in him.—But is this our experience, or is it not? It is for substance, though with circumstantial variations, I trust, the experience of all true Christians: and yet I fear many, who are zealous for orthodox doctrines, continue strangers to this method of coming to Christ from day to day, for his complete salvation.* I proceed, however,

IV. To observe that Christ will most certainly receive all who come unto him. This is here most emphatically declared, "Him that cometh unto me, I will *in no wise* cast out;" and the double negation in the original is still more expressive. Had the vilest sinner, who ever trembled under the desponding apprehensions of having sinned beyond all reach of mercy, been allowed to draw up a clause for his own encouragement in coming to the Saviour, he could scarcely have worded it more favourably. Imagine the basest character, which ever disgraced humanity, and scourged the world; one grown hoary in multiplied robberies, murders, adulteries, rapes and unnatural lusts; and breathing out perjuries and blasphemies, as if ambitious of pre-eminence in profaneness: if even this man truly come to Christ, "he will *in no wise* cast him out." Suppose the most consummate villany to the very verge of life, carried on under the broad vizor of designed hypocrisy; or some wretch, emboldened in sin by the very gospel itself, who had given such scandal, that thousands in hell should curse him as the occasion of their perdition; or some vile apostate, some Judas, who had betrayed and sold his Lord. If even such persons *really come* to Christ in the manner that hath been described, he will, he can "*in no wise* cast any of them out." He *can-*

* "As the godly consideration of predestination and our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as *feel in themselves* the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things; as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of unclean living, no less perilous than desperation."—(17th Article.)

Digitized by Google

not; not from a *natural*, but a *moral inability*—he *cannot* deny himself: he cannot alter the word that is gone out of his lips. I determine not whether they ever do actually come, or whether it is much to be expected that they should: for "there is a sin unto death," and "it is impossible to renew some unto repentance." But did they come, even at the last hour, they should "*in no wise be cast out*;" for there is nothing in the constitution of the gospel to exclude them from mercy. Should there then be one present who is ready to despair, and trembles to approach the mercy-seat, because he expects and dreads a repulse; let him make the trial, and plead the promise and wait the Lord's time in his way; and he shall find, that neither aggravated guilt, nor strong corruptions, nor inveterate evil habits, can exclude him from this full and free salvation.

No man has the least occasion in such circumstances to inquire previously whether he be elected, which he cannot possibly know in this stage of his experience. He needs only to ask himself, am I sincerely willing to be saved from sin, and all its consequences, in the humbling, self-denying, method of the gospel? Do I believe that Jesus, and he alone, is able thus to save me? Do I apply to him and trust in him for these things: and am I so willing as to observe his directions, and use the means which he hath appointed for that end? Every *approach* to a temper and conduct, so opposite to corrupt nature, must be from some kind or degree of influence of the Holy Spirit; and whatever looks like it should be in a measure encouraged. But as many promising appearances are blighted, and the Scripture speaks of such as "had been partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, who yet fell away:" we are constrained to add, that not every operation of this kind is that good work, which distinguishes the chosen people of God.—Nay, probably few perish, where the word of God is fully preached, without many awakenings, many fears, many desires, yea, and many feeble endeavours, which are all subdued and extinguished through the love of sin. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Yet as far as there is any tendency to good in these things, they are to be ascribed to a good cause: and not only "hating the light," and acting in defiance of their own consciences, but also "resisting the Holy Ghost," will at the day of judgment be found among the aggravations of sin, in many that perish.

Nor are they who are saved free from the same guilt: but in them grace proves victorious; and, though resisted, by invincible efficacy it gains the ascendancy. This distinguishing work of God will in time shew itself, and make it evident that the man was drawn and taught of God in coming to Christ. Hence, when all are invited, none will come but they who are *willing*: none are *willing*, but such as are made *willing* by God: he makes none willing but *the elect*: he would have all encouraged, who are willing: he will have all sinners left without excuse: no one can know his election, but by his vocation; nor his vocation, until he hath actually come to Christ: and there is no way to answer these ends, but by free and urgent invitations, connected with warnings, instructions, and expostulations. If this style of address be not adopted, you "quench the smoking flax, and break the bruised reed:" for the trembling penitent will be apt to say, "If any poor sinner may not come, how can I know that I may? For I know not that I am elected: but if every one is invited, then I may come, and now I am heartily willing, and this gives me encouragement."

Many are zealous for the system, who do not understand the arguments by which it is maintained: but he that does, will allow that this question is the very knot of the whole controversy; *who makes a man willing to be saved in the method of the gospel?** If any natural preferable disposition, or any improvement of nature, contribute to produce this willingness, then the doc-

* I say, *in the method of the gospel*: for every man is willing to be saved from misery and to be made happy, if it may but be in some way of his own, either favourable to his pride, or to his love of sin.

Digitized by Google

trines generally called Arminianism must be true; and boasting must be introduced. But if *God alone produce this willingness without any help, and notwithstanding every hindrance, from man's evil nature, then the grand principles of Calvinism are established, and boasting is excluded.* Do not mistake my meaning. Notions in the head do not always suitably influence the heart and conduct. Many of those who are called, and who call themselves Arminians, are far enough from boasting, nay, are remarkably pious and humble: and too many Calvinists are haughty, dogmatical, censorious, and contentious. But a humble believer in Jesus is a brother, and entitled to our cordial love, though he cannot subscribe our whole creed.

This, however, being the real question, it contains nothing that militates against invitations: we invite *all that will* to come to Christ for his salvation: and as it is not necessary to make any limitation in respect of the *unwilling*, who sufficiently distinguish themselves; so we give the invitation in all respects general and unencumbered.—"As many as ye shall find bid to the marriage." My fellow-sinners, if you are willing, you will apply to our merciful Saviour, and you shall find mercy and grace; but if any of you are not willing, raise no slander against him; charge him not with unwillingness, but be sure the fault is entirely your own.—I proceed then,

V. To observe that Christ's commission reacheth to the infallible and everlasting salvation of the body and soul of every individual who is given to him, who sees him, and believes on him. "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all, which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Indeed this unavoidably follows from all that hath been already discoursed; and likewise from that unchangeable wisdom, faithfulness, and love of God; and from his promise, covenant, and counsel, "confirmed with an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie; we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast." Heb. vi. 17—19.—"Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.—Moreover, whom he predestinated them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that *justifieth*."—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. viii. 29—39. To object, that though nothing else can, our own sin may separate us from Christ, is a mere evasion; for nothing has any tendency to separate betwixt Christ and the believer, except sin, or as any thing powerfully tempts him to sin.

In like manner Peter confirms the doctrine of his "beloved brother Paul," at the very opening of his first epistle, which begins in this manner: "To the strangers—elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus—Grace unto you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept *by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*" 1 Pet. i. 7. Comp. Luke xxii. 22. And again, "Unto you that believe he is precious; but unto them that be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made

Digitized by Google

the head of the corner; and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a *chosen generation*, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." 1 Pet. ii. 7—10.—"For God had not *appointed* them to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thes. v. 9. Thus likewise says another apostle, "Of *his own will*, begat he us with the word of truth; that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." James i. 18. And our Lord himself says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are One." John x. 27—30. The only way in which Satan, or any other enemy, can endeavour to pluck the sheep out of Christ's hand, is by tempting them to wilful and final apostacy: but in this attempt every enemy must be unsuccessful, according to the obvious meaning of such express and absolute promises: and if this conclusion may not be deduced from them, both these, and all the other numerous Scriptures which are calculated to give a strong consolation to them who flee for refuge to Christ, not providing against this only danger, mean just nothing at all.

What though many professors of the gospel apostatise! Who can warrant their preceding sincerity? "They went out from us, *because they were not of us*," says one apostle. "There must be heresies" (false teachers and false doctrines) "that they that are approved may be made manifest," says another. But surely this is not applicable to all who decline in their profession! Let us then suppose the persons in question not to be apostates but backsliders. Can we positively say, this or that man dies impenitent? Such decisions belong to God, not us. Without all doubt if a professed Christian run into notorious sin, or renounce his religion, and live and die impenitent, "he will perish everlastingly:" for he alone, "who continueth unto the end shall be saved." The doctrine of final perseverance is not at all concerned in this case; for the man's apostacy is the detection of his hypocrisy: and the only question is, whether God hath not in his word engaged to preserve all *real believers* from thus finally departing from him.

Except a man be truly converted, he can only persevere in open ungodliness, or in hypocrisy. Except he have scriptural evidence of his conversion he cannot warrantably conclude any thing concerning his perseverance: and if a professor of the gospel, while living in habitual sin, or in a negligent and slothful manner, encourages himself by this doctrine, he is guilty of awful presumption. But the true Christian, habitually and sincerely abiding in Christ, and walking in all his ordinances and commandments; amidst his sharp conflicts with corruption and temptation, and his fears of future consequences, may find a most reviving cordial to refresh his drooping spirits, and renew his strength; from the assurance that Christ will make him at length more than conqueror, and "preserve him from every evil work unto his heavenly kingdom."

The stony-ground hearers, however flourishing, having "no root in themselves," must one day wither away. The ground overgrown with thorns, the emblem of worldly professors, will "bear no fruit to perfection." But "they who receive the seed in good ground, in *an honest and good heart*," made such by divine grace, will "bring forth fruit with *patience*." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him," says our Lord to the woman of Samaria, meaning especially the Spirit of life and holiness, "shall *never* thirst, but the water that I shall give him, shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life." It will spring up in all holy affections, and flow forth in all holy thoughts, words, and actions, until it be perfected in eternal glory. John iv. 14. vii. 37—39.

The real Christian is generally very far from thinking he has attained per-

Digitized by Google

fection. As a poor sinner he still feels abundant cause for the daily exercise of repentance and faith; and he daily needs the free mercy of the Father, the precious blood of the Son, and fresh supplies of the grace of the Spirit. He has occasion for constant watchfulness and prayer: and he often wants reproof and chastisement. Seasons of slackness, and instances of transgression, he has to mourn over: and if he steps farther out of the way, his security lies in the following promises and assurances: "As many as the Lord loves he rebukes and chastens." "They shall be my people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, and *I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*" Jer. xxxii. 38—40. For in this manner the Lord brings back his offending children with weeping and supplication. The final perseverance of all who hold certain doctrines, relate plausible experiences, or make a credible profession, cannot be made to consist with matter of fact. But the final perseverance of the true penitent believer in Christ, who is delivered from the dominion of sin; who through faith in Christ hath in some degree overcome the world, and aspires after a more complete victory; who has learned to hate all sin, and delight in the law of God, and is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, is doubtless a truth of God's word. Yea, without a peradventure, the meanest, feeblest, true believer on earth shall infallibly "be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." "For this is the will of him that sent me, that of all whom he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

And this leads me,

VI. To observe,—That all this is perfectly consistent with many things which some object to as Arminianism. It is surprising to hear some persons, who profess themselves Calvinists, in doubt whether their principles be consistent with the government of the world by rewards and punishments, proposed as motives to the hopes and fears of mankind. Surely if the Bible do in any part teach those doctrines which are denominated Calvinism, they must implicitly pervade the whole of it; and we can have no occasion to have recourse to an opposite system, in order to explain any part of the sacred volume! For what reason can any one suppose that punishment is less deserved on these principles than on the other? The fore-knowledge, or secret purpose of God is not the effective cause or inducing motive of any man's rebellion, impenitence, and rejection of the gospel; and therefore cannot form an excuse for him, or render his condemnation less just. This decree neither deprives a man of any thing good which he either possessed or merited, nor puts any *evil* disposition into his heart. The Lord merely determines to leave the sinner to himself; without any efficacious, invincible, or unmerited interposition, to prevent him from destroying himself by his voluntary wickedness and obstinacy. On the other hand, a man must deviate very far indeed from the whole scheme of Christianity, who supposes that the *reward of a believing sinner is merited.* Many Arminians allow as expressly, (though not perhaps quite so consistently,) as the Calvinists, that the reward is not of debt but of grace.—Fear of future punishment, yea, hope of future reward, (though blind and presumptuous,) answer, even respecting those who eventually perish, important purposes in God's providence, exactly the same upon one scheme as upon the other. They are not effectual for the salvation of the ungodly; but they keep mankind in some measure of order, and prevent much wickedness: for what a world would it be were all the wicked entirely liberated from all the fear of future punishment, or wholly desperate! At the same time the Lord, in calling his elect, and in preserving them in his ways, draws them on, and effects his purposes of love, in a considerable degree, by means of their hopes of future happiness, and their fears of future misery.

What then is there in these doctrines inconsistent with charging guilt up-

Digitized by Google

on men's consciences: warning them to flee from the wrath to come; laying open the law as the ministration of condemnation; calling upon sinners to repent and believe the gospel; and exhorting them to "labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" to "strive to enter in at the strait gate;" to search the Scriptures, to pray, "to press into the kingdom of heaven; to forsake their sins, and to separate from sinners?" These are the appointed means, which in all ages have been owned of God for the conviction of sinners: and though, without supernatural grace, they prove insufficient to overcome man's strong corruption: yet they are suitable means; as suitable as ploughing and sowing to procure the crop, though here also God alone can give the increase: so suitable, that in the mouth of the prisoner Paul they made even a proud Felix tremble, and almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian!

What is there inconsistent with inviting sinners to come to Christ; with warning them not "to neglect so great salvation," nor "to refuse him that speaketh;" or with declaring that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who reject the gospel? What inconsistent with exhorting men to "examine themselves whether they be in the faith;" and to "look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;" "to give diligence to make their calling and election sure:" and to be careful that no man deceive them, and that they do not deceive themselves? What is there inconsistent with distinguishing between the true Christian and the false professor: with exhorting Christians to adorn their profession; to glorify God, to "let their light shine before men;" to be "faithful to the unrighteous mammon;" to "redeem their time;" to "walk circumspectly;" to beware of growing negligent: to press forward, and to be ready to every good work? What inconsistent with declaring that "hereby we know the children of God, and the children of the devil; every one that doeth not righteousness is not of God:" "Every one that committeth sin is of the devil?"

Finally, what is there inconsistent with discoursing to *Christians* very particularly concerning the Christian temper and walk; concerning relative duties, and all other duties; and admonishing, persuading, reproving, beseeching, exhorting them, in every method, and by every motive, "to walk worthy of God, who hath called them to his kingdom and glory?" There must be a vast disadvantage in arguing against these things, which are so fully handled in the Scriptures, and are so naturally expressed in scriptural terms; and if we be proved inconsistent, we have this consolation, that every writer of the sacred Scriptures will share the same censure.—But, in one word, are *means* any part of God's plan? * If they are not, the argument not only concludes against *practical preaching*, but against *all preaching*; and we may as sensibly give over ploughing our fields, eating our food, and taking medicine. † But if *means*, as well as *ends*, be provided for in the divine counsels; then these doctrines form as firm a foundation for all exhortations, instructions, warnings, invitations, and expostulations of the preacher; and for all diligence, and watchfulness, and activity of the hearer, as the opposite tenets: and as long as I believe them *true*, I shall have no doubt but they give us an advantage in enforcing all these topics; for I shall not easily be convinced that *error subserves holy practice, and truth subverts it.* Indeed, besides the native tendency of these means, there appears a more close connection of the means with the blessing, from the consideration that the same Lord, who appointed the means, hath promised the blessing, and inclines the heart to use them.

* That is, did God predestinate the end *with*, or *without reference* to the means, by which he intended to accomplish the end?

† The apostle Paul was assured, in a vision, that the life of every individual who sailed with him should be preserved: yet afterwards he declared as positively, "That except the seamen continued in the ship, they could not be saved." (Acts xxvii. 24—31.) Was the event then doubtful? Was there any alteration in the purpose of God? Was the apostle inconsistent? Or did the passengers act rationally, when, without hesitation, or any accusation of the apostle as inconsistent, they went and cut the cords, and let the boat fall into the sea, thus defeating the intention of the sailors?

This was (as a friend observed to me) common sense, which is a very different thing from the vain reasonings of men in matters of religion. The truth is, God determined to save the lives of Paul and those that sailed with him; but he determined to save them *in this precise manner, and in no other*; and the means were as infallibly decreed as the event.

Digitized by Google

And now in applying the subject I would observe,

1. That while numbers argue with the greatest vehemence against the points in question, and groundlessly charge them with implying the most dishonourable thoughts of God, and tending to the most pernicious consequences; others are ready to say, in extravagant zeal, to any one of greater moderation, "If you really believe these doctrines, why do you preach them so sparingly, cautiously, and practically?"—I would desire such a man carefully to study even Paul's Epistles, and to answer the objection himself. Perhaps he may thus find, that there is not a less proportion on such subjects in our sermons and publications, than in his writings: and that he as carefully guards them from perversion, and connects them as much with holy practice, as we can do. We generally meet with a few verses in an Epistle, upon the doctrines in question; a much larger proportion upon the person, love, and sufferings of Christ, and on faith in him; and whole chapters upon a holy life and conversation: and if we do not in the same manner, proportion, guard, and connect these doctrines, hypocrites will pervert them, infidels will despise them, and the weak will be stumbled by them. Indeed they are not at all proper subjects for addresses to sinners, to prejudiced hearers, or to newly-awakened persons; and are seldom, if ever, found in Scripture explicitly thus addressed: but a great part of our more public ministry is exercised among such persons. Let it not then be thought *carnal policy* to adapt our discourses to the occasions and wants of the hearers, while nothing inconsistent with truth is spoken, nothing profitable kept back. Our Lord himself says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now:" and Paul writes to some, who had as good an opinion of themselves, as numbers now have, and with almost as little reason, "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal.—I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet are ye now able:" and he gives a reason for this conduct, which proves that many in our congregations are not able: namely, the prevalence of strife and contention among them. Cor. ii. 2 Peter iii. 16.

The truth is, many persons would scarcely hear any thing except these doctrines! but though I firmly believe them, and should be glad for all real Christians to have the comfort of them; yet, when they are *disjointed* from their practical influence, they form in my judgment a very small part of Christianity. If God be pleased to bless the word in bringing men to repentance, faith, and holiness, to a Christian hope, temper, and conduct; we shall in general find it no hard matter to convince them that this is the fruit of electing love, and the sure earnest of eternal glory. And if a few do not see their privilege here, they will eternally rejoice in it hereafter.

2. God's secret purposes are consistent with his revealed declarations. Let then no sinner vainly endeavour to excuse his sins, or quiet his conscience, by a perversion of these doctrines. Though "the salvation of the righteous is wholly of the LORD;" the damnation of the wicked is wholly of themselves: and if the lustre of these truths dazzles the eyes of some poor distressed souls, some weak believers or inquirers; let them turn their attention to another part of divine truth. Still, still this is true, "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."*

3. How careful should we be to ascertain the reality of our *conversion*, before we take the comfort of *perseverance!* An error in this matter proves fatal to thousands, who, mistaking some transient emotions and affections for a saving change, buoy up their hopes to the end by perverting these truths, and perish with a lie in their right hand. And let it be especially observed, that the scriptural way of "making our calling and election sure," is, by giving all diligence, not only in the means of grace, but in following after holiness, and abounding in every good work. 2 Peter i. 3—11.

* "We must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in holy Scripture; and in our doings the will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God." (17th Art.)

Digitized by Google

4. The genuine tendency of these doctrines, (as completely excluding boasting, leading us to ascribe all the glory of contriving, preparing, revealing, and applying salvation, wholly to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and thus producing deeper humiliation, and inspiring more lively gratitude, than any other system,) forms their chief excellency. Did we entirely and constantly live under their influence, we could never despise others, admire and prefer ourselves, or be angry with such as differed from us. We should "in meekness instruct those who oppose themselves:" we should argue, persuade, and exhort them; because these are the means which God hath appointed, and we may hope for his blessing on them. But, "as the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," we certainly should never slander or revile others, or contend with acrimony; or hold up an opponent to derision and contempt, whilst, with an air of conscious superiority, as if "we had made ourselves to differ," we plume ourselves and our party, on pre-eminent *discernment*, if not integrity. These are none of the means which God hath appointed; we cannot expect a blessing on them, nor can they do any credit to the cause.

Take heed, therefore, beloved, that your zeal for the doctrine do not lead you into a spirit and conduct, diametrically opposite to that humility, compassion, meekness, and gentleness, which it is calculated to inspire.—If Calvinists dispute with acrimony, pass hard censures, spread slanderous reports about others, judge another man's servants, and be quarrelsome and implacable; the doctrines which they profess are not to blame, nor yet their belief of them; but their want of more inward holiness, if indeed they be not wholly unsanctified. Yet the cause suffers, and the truth is disgraced, through their misconduct: and one moderate man, who loves and is kind to Christians, without respect of party, and who differs from his brethren peaceably and charitably, where constrained to differ; and adorns his profession by a holy life and conversation, will do more even in bringing others, cordially and intelligently, to embrace his sentiments, than twenty angry disputants who humour the pride and the malignant passions of their own party, but disgust and prejudice the minds of all who differ from them—"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Neither let it be inferred from your conduct, that amidst the zeal of Calvinists for proselyting others to their tenets, they are less active in seeking the conversion and salvation of sinners, than their brethren whom they call Arminians. If indeed we are true believers, God hath made use of *means* and *instruments* to effect the secret purposes of his everlasting love towards us: and what is there in our peculiar opinions, that should render us less desirous of being his instruments in communicating the same blessing to others; or less sanguine in our expectations of success while using his appointed means? And what other *stimulus* can we want to excite our most self-denying, perilous, and zealous endeavours to spread his Gospel, than the special distinguishing love of God our Saviour, so freely shown in "delivering us from the wrath to come," and "calling us to his eternal glory, by Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Finally, my Brethern, if you have attained to a scriptural assurance of your calling and election, "give diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: "remember from what a dreadful state you are so wonderfully delivered; how free to you this deliverance; what a price it cost your Redeemer; and what he hath done for you, and prepared for you. While you rejoice in the Lord, rejoice likewise in your tribulations, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, in all your conflicts and temptations: and let "the love of Christ constrain you to live no longer to yourselves, but to him, who died for you, and rose again." "Be ye therefore steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAYS

ON

THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

IN

RELIGION.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.—ISAIAH viii. 20.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAYS.

ESSAY I.

On the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

It is manifest to all, who seriously reflect on the powers and propensities of human nature, that we are formed capable of religion, and have an inward consciousness that we ought to worship some superior Being, on whom our safety and happiness depend: but, at the same time, the state of the world, in all places where the Bible has not been known, unanswerably proves, that we are incapable of discovering for ourselves, a religion which is worthy of God, suited to our wants, and conducive to our true interest. The shortness of life also, and the reasonable persuasion that men in general entertain of a future state, concur to shew that our grand concern lies in another world. Yet uncertainty and perplexity, nay, palpable error and absurdity, have ever encumbered men's reasonings and conjectures on these important subjects. Even at Athens, Jehovah was "the unknown God," Acts xvii. 23. and all beyond the grave was an unknown world.

The wisest of the pagans, therefore, considered a revelation from the Deity as exceedingly desirable, in order that bewildered mortals might learn the way in which they could worship him with acceptance, and be happy; and some of them entertained hopes that such an inestimable favour would at length be vouchsafed. Indeed confused expectations of this kind have been common in the world; as is manifest from the reception that hath been given to pretended revelations, which otherwise could not have obtained credit and currency.

Various impositions, in this matter, have been detected by a careful investigation; and there is but one book in the world, which so much as appears to be a revelation from God. This has stood the test of ages, and undergone the most severe scrutiny; and the more it has been examined by serious inquirers, the fuller conviction have they obtained of its authenticity. No one now ventures forth as an avowed adversary, to dispute its claim in the open field of fair argument: yet few in comparison are *practically* convinced, that it is the unerring word of God; and an increasing number of objectors perplex themselves and others, by discovering supposed inconsistencies, or unimportant difficulties; or by setting up their own reasonings and imaginations in opposition to its doctrines, and making that disagreement a ground of hesitation or rejection. So that scepticism, or a partial, frivolous, disingenuous, carping infidelity, have become exceedingly common; the minds of young persons especially are poisoned by them; great

Digitized by Google

pains are taken to disseminate these cavils and objections (though they have been solidly answered again and again); and those persons are treated as weak enthusiasts, or irrational bigots, who simply believe the Scriptures as the sure testimony of God.

It may, therefore, be seasonable to state, with all possible brevity, some of the most conclusive reasons, by which reflecting men have been induced to submit to the authority of the Bible, and to believe, that it is a revelation from the God of Truth. By the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures I mean, such an immediate and complete discovery, by the Holy Spirit to the minds of the sacred penmen, of those things which could not have been otherwise known, and such an effectual superintendency as to those matters which they might be informed of by other means, as entirely to preserve them from all error, in every particular, which could in the least affect any of the doctrines or commandments contained in their writings. Every proposition, therefore, is to be considered as the sure testimony of God, in that sense, according to which the sacred penmen proposed it as truth. Thus facts occurred, and words were spoken, as they stand recorded in the Scripture, as to the import of them, and the instruction to be deduced from them: but we must judge of those facts, or discourses, by the doctrinal and preceptive parts of the Scriptures: nor does it at all invalidate the complete inspiration of the sacred writers to allow, that they expressed themselves in common language, and wrote of things as men generally spoke of them, rather than according to philosophical exactness, or in the style that was used in the schools of the learned, during the ages in which they lived. Supposed, or unimportant errors, or inaccuracies of expression in such things, are not in the least inconsistent with that entire divine inspiration of which we speak; for the Scriptures were not written to render us exact philosophers, or to instruct us in ancient history and geography, but to make us wise unto salvation. Nor do the few immaterial mistakes, which in a long course of years have crept in, through the errors of transcribers, create any difficulty or uncertainty to the humble and teachable inquirer; though they may give occasion to the self-sufficient to cavil and object; for the "Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness."

Moreover, it is futile and absurd for any man to dispute against particular doctrines, as unreasonable, to disallow any facts as incredible, or to quarrel with any divine dispensations as unrighteous, when he finds himself unable to answer the plain arguments, which are adduced to prove the whole to be the word of God. If our premises be undeniable, and our deductions unavoidable, obstinacy and self-conceit alone will persist in incredulity; and ridicule, reviling, subtile insinuations, or witty sarcasms, are, in such a case, certain indications of a proud and bitter enmity to the truth itself. If, then, the arguments that shall be adduced, be sufficient to prove the Bible to be the word of God, I hope the reader will recollect, that as a reasonable man, he is bound to study, believe, and obey it, as the rule and standard of all his principles, affections, and conduct. These things having been premised, I observe—

I. That vast numbers of wise and good men, through many generations and in distant countries, have agreed in receiving the Bible as a divine revelation. Many of them have been noted for seriousness, erudition, penetration, and impartiality in judging of men and things. With much labour and patient investigation, they detected the impostures by which their contemporaries were duped; yet the same assiduous examination confirmed them in believing the Bible to be "the word of God," and induced them to recommend it, living and dying, to all others, as the source of wisdom, hope, and consolation. In this view, the tradition of the church has much weight; for whatever abuse has been made of the term, by such as were no part of the true church, yet the whole company of those, who have worshipped the living God in spirit and truth (including them who ventured and laid down their lives for conscience sake, and who were the most pious, holy, and useful

Digitized by Google

men in every age), having unanimously concurred in handing down to us the Scriptures as a divine revelation, and having very little differed about the books which form a part of that sacred deposit, must be allowed to be a consideration of great importance. And I cannot but suppose, that if a being of entire impartiality, of sound judgment, and holy disposition, should be shown the two companies, of those who have received and of those who have rejected the Scriptures; and should compare the seriousness, learning, patient investigation of truth, solid judgment, holy lives, and composure in a dying hour, (without unmanly terror or indecent levity), of the one company, with the character and conduct of the other; he would be induced to take up the Bible with profound veneration, and the strongest prepossession in its favour.

II. The agreement of the sacred penmen among themselves is another cogent argument of their divine inspiration. Should an equal number of contemporaries, of the same country, education, habits, profession, natural disposition, and rank in life, concur in writing a book on religious subjects, as large as the Bible, each furnishing his proportion, without comparing notes together; the attentive reader, whose mind had been long inured to such studies, would be able to discover some diversity of opinion among them. But the penmen of the Scripture succeeded each other, during the term of fifteen hundred years: some of them were princes, or priests: others shepherds and fishermen, &c.: their natural abilities, education, habits, and employments, were exceedingly varied: they wrote laws, history, prophecy, odes, devotional exercises, proverbs, parables, doctrines, controversy, &c. each man had his distinct department: yet they all exactly coincide, in the exhibition they give us of the perfections, works, truths, and will of God; of the nature, situation, and obligations of man; of sin and salvation; of this world and the next; and in short, of all things connected with our duty, safety, interest, and comfort, and in the whole of the religion inculcated by them. They all were evidently of the same judgment, aimed to establish the same principles, and applied them to the same practical purposes. *Apparent* inconsistencies will indeed perplex the superficial reader: but they will vanish after a more accurate investigation: nor could ever any charge of disagreement among the penmen of the Bible be substantiated; for it can only be said, that they related the same facts with different circumstances, which are perfectly reconcileable; and that they gave instructions suited to the persons whom they addressed, without systematically shewing the harmony of them with other parts of divine truth. They wrote not by concert, and bestowed no pains to avoid the appearance of inconsistency; yet the exact coincidence that is perceived among them by the diligent student is most astonishing, and cannot be accounted for on any rational principles, without admitting that they "wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

To this we may add, that the Scripture history accords, in a wonderful manner, with the most authentic records which remain of the events, customs, and manners of the countries and ages to which it stands related. The rise and fall of empires, the revolutions that have taken place in the world, and the grand outlines of chronology, &c., are coincident with those stated by most approved ancient writers; whilst the palpable errors in these respects, detected in the apocryphal books, constitute one of the most decisive reasons for rejecting them as spurious. The history of the Bible is of far greater antiquity than any other records extant in the world; and it is remarkable, that in many instances it shows the real origin of those absurd fables, which disgrace and obscure all other histories of those remote times; and this is no feeble proof, that it was derived from some surer source of information than human tradition.

III. The miracles by which the penmen of the Scriptures confirmed their divine mission to their contemporaries, afford us also a most convincing proof in this matter. The account of these miracles may be evidently shown to have been published in the very ages and places in which they were said to

Digitized by Google

have been wrought, openly; in the presence of vast multitudes, enemies as well as friends; yet this public challenge never called forth any man to deny that they were really performed, nor was an attempt of this kind ever made till long afterwards. Can any man of common sense think, that Moses and Aaron could possibly have persuaded the whole nation of Israel, that they had witnessed all the plagues of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, with the waters piled on each side of them, gathered the manna every morning, and seen all the wonders recorded in their history, if no such events had taken place? If, then, that generation could not be thus imposed on, when could the belief of such extraordinary events be palmed upon the nation? Surely it would have been impossible, in the next age, to persuade them that their fathers had seen and experienced such wonderful things, when they had never heard a single word about them in their lives; and when an appeal must have been made to them, that these were things well known among them! What credit could have been obtained to such a forgery at any subsequent period? It would have been absolutely necessary, in making this attempt, to persuade the whole people, that such traditions had always been current among them; that the memory of them had for ages been perpetuated by days and ordinances observed by them all; and that their whole civil and religious establishment had thence originated: and could this have possibly been effected, if they all had known, that no such memorials and traditions had ever before been heard of among them? The same might be shown concerning the other miracles recorded in Scripture, especially those of Christ and his apostles; and it might be made evident, that the man who denies them to have been actually performed, must believe more wonderful things without any evidence, than those are which he rejects, though established by unanswerable proof. But brevity will only allow me to insist on one miraculous event, viz. the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; for this being once proved, the whole Scripture is evinced to be a divine revelation. His doctrine and authority establishes the authenticity of the Old Testament; and the witnesses of his resurrection were the penmen of the New Testament.

Almost all human affairs are conducted by testimony; the concurrence of two or three unexceptionable witnesses is sufficient to prove any fact, that is in its own nature credible: and the resurrection of a dead person, by Omnipotence, and for the most important purposes, cannot reasonably be deemed incredible. The ancient prophets had predicted the resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm xvi. 10; Isaiah liii. 10—12): and indeed every pre-intimation of his glorious and perpetual kingdom, when compared with the prophecies of his sufferings and death, implied that he would rise again from the dead. His very enemies knew, that he had foretold his own resurrection *within three days*, and took precautions accordingly; yet the body was gone, and they could give no rational account what was become of it. They had the whole authority vested in them; and their reputation was deeply concerned: yet they rather chose to bear the open charge of the basest murder and prevarication imaginable, than excite any further inquiry; by bringing either the soldiers, who guarded the sepulchre, or the disciples, who were said to have stolen the body, to a public trial; though they had the latter in their custody. The eleven apostles (to whom a twelfth was soon added) were a sufficient number of competent witnesses, being men of plain sense and blameless lives; they could not but identify the person of their Master, whom they had so long attended; they unanimously testified, that they had received the fullest assurance of their senses to his resurrection, and at length beheld him ascend up towards heaven, till he was received out of their sight: and they persisted invariably in this testimony for many years. They were evidently intimidated, to a great degree, by the crucifixion of their Lord, and backward to credit his resurrection: they could have no possible secular motive to invent and propagate such a report; for ignominy, torture, and death must be the probable consequences of espous-

Digitized by Google

ing the cause of one, who had been crucified as a deceiver. In all other things they appeared simple, upright, holy men: yet, if in this they deceived, the world never yet produced such a company of artful and wicked impostors! Yet they evidently proposed no advantage to themselves from their deep laid and well conducted schemes! They spent all the rest of their lives in promoting the religion of Jesus; renouncing every earthly interest; facing all kinds of opposition and persecution; prepared habitually to seal their testimony with their blood; and most of them actually dying martyrs in the cause, recommending it with their latest breath. Moreover, when they went forth to preach Christ as risen from the dead, they were manifestly changed, in almost every respect, from what they had before been: their timidity gave place to the most undaunted courage; their carnal prejudices vanished; their ambitious contests ceased; their narrow views were immensely expanded, and zeal for the honour of their Lord, with love to the souls of men, seem to have engrossed and elevated all the powers of their minds. There were also many other competent witnesses to the same great event, even to the number of five hundred: these too concurred in the same testimony to the end of their lives; and neither fear, hope, nor dissention among themselves induced so much as one of them to vary from the testimony of the rest: nay, the apostates from Christianity never openly charged the apostles with any imposition in this respect. A more complete human testimony to any event cannot even be imagined: for if our Lord had shown himself "openly to all the people" of the Jews, and their rulers had persisted in rejecting him, it would have rather weakened than confirmed the evidence; and if they had unanimously received him as the Messiah, it might have excited in others a suspicion, that it was a plan concerted for aggrandizing the nation.

But God himself was also pleased to add his own testimony to that of his servants; conferring on them the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enabling them to impart the same miraculous powers to others, by the laying on of their hands. Thus the number of witnesses continually increased, the testimony was more widely diffused, and no enemy could deny, that they, who attested Christ's resurrection, performed most stupendous miracles (Acts iv. 13—16.) In consequence of this, the unlettered, unarmed, and despised preachers of a crucified and risen Saviour prevailed against all the combined power, learning, wealth, superstition, and wickedness of the world, till Christianity was completely established upon the ruins of Judaism and Pagan idolatry! Here again, it may be demanded, when could the belief of such facts have been obtruded on mankind, if they had never happened? Surely not in the age, when they were said to have been witnessed by tens of thousands, who were publicly challenged to deny them if they could! Not in any subsequent age; for the origin of Christianity was ascribed to them, and millions must have been persuaded, that they had always believed those things, which they had never to that time so much as heard of! We may then venture to assert, that no past event was ever so fully proved as our Lord's resurrection; and that it would not be half so preposterous to doubt, whether such a man as Julius Cæsar ever existed, as it would be to question, whether Jesus actually arose from the dead. What then do they mean, who oppose some little apparent variations, in the account given of this event by the four Evangelists (which have repeatedly been shown capable of an easy reconciliation,) to such an unparalleled complication of evidence, that it did actually take place?

IV. The prophecies contained in the Sacred Scriptures, and fulfilling to this day, prove them to be divinely inspired. These form a species of perpetual miracles, which challenge the investigation of men in every age; and which, though overlooked by the careless and prejudiced, cannot fail of producing conviction proportioned to the attention paid to them. The prophecies of the Messiah, which are to be found in almost all the books of the Old Testament, when compared with the exact accomplishment of them, as recorded in the authentic writings of the Evangelists, abundantly prove them

Digitized by Google

to have been penned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: whilst the existence of the Jews, as a people differing from all others upon the face of the earth, and their regard to them, as the sacred oracles handed down from their progenitors, sufficiently vouch for their antiquity (though further proof in abundance is at hand, did brevity admit of it). According to the predictions of these books, Nineveh hath been desolated (Nahum i, ii, iii); Babylon swept with the besom of destruction (Isaiah xiii, xiv); Tyre become a place to dry nets in (Ezek. xxvi. 4, 5); Egypt the basest of the kingdoms, &c. (Ezek. xxix. 14, 15). These and many other events fulfilling ancient prophecies, so many ages after they were delivered, can never be accounted for, except by allowing that he, who sees the end from the beginning, thus revealed his secret purposes; that the accomplishment of them might prove the Scriptures to be his word of instruction to mankind.

In like manner, there are evident predictions interwoven almost with the writings of every penman of the New Testament, as a divine attestation to their doctrine. The destruction of Jerusalem, with all the circumstances predicted in the Evangelists (an account of which may be seen in Josephus's History of the Jewish Wars); the series of ages during which that city hath been "trodden under foot of the Gentiles;" the long continued dispersion of the Jews, and the conversion of the nations to Christianity; the many antichristian corruptions of the gospel; the superstition, uncommanded austerities, idolatry, tyranny, and persecution of the Roman hierarchy; the division of the empire into ten kingdoms; their concurrence during many ages to support the usurpations of the Church of Rome; and the existence of Christianity to this day, amidst so many enemies, who have used every possible method to destroy it; when compared with the predictions of the New Testament, do not come short of the fullest demonstration which the case will admit of, that the books that contain them are the unerring word of God.

V. Only the Scriptures (and such books as make them their basis) introduce the infinite God as speaking in a manner worthy of himself; with simplicity, majesty, and authority. His character, as there delineated, comprises all possible excellency, without any intermixture; his laws and ordinances accord to his perfections; his works and dispensations exhibit them, and all his dealings with his creatures bear the stamp of infinite wisdom, justice, purity, truth, goodness, and mercy, harmoniously displayed. The description there given of the state of the world, and of human nature, widely differs from our ideas of them; yet the facts unanswerably prove it to be exactly true. The records of every nation, the events of every age, and the history of every individual, confute men's self-flattery in this respect; and prove, that the penmen of the Bible knew the human character better than any philosopher, ancient or modern, ever did. Their account teaches us what men are about, and what may be expected from them; whilst all, who form a different estimate of it, find their principles inapplicable to facts, their theories incapable of being reduced to practice, and their expectations strangely disappointed. The Bible, well understood, enables us to account for those events which have appeared inexplicable to men in every age: and the more carefully any one watches and scrutinizes all the motives, intentions, imaginations, and desires of his heart, for a length of time; the clearer will it appear to him, that the penmen of the Scriptures give a far more just account of his disposition and character, than he could have done of himself. In short, man is such a being, and the world is in such a state, as they have described: yet multiplied facts, constant observation, and reiterated experience are insufficient to convince us of it, till we first learn it from the Bible: and then comparing all that passes within and around us, with what we there read, we become more and more acquainted with our own hearts, and established in the belief of its divine original.

The mysteries contained in Scripture rather confirm than invalidate this conclusion: for a pretended revelation without mystery would confute itself.

Digitized by Google

Incomprehensibility is inseparable from God, and all his works, even as low as the growth of a blade of grass; the mysteries of the Scriptures are sublime, interesting, and useful: they display the divine perfections, lay a foundation for our hope, and inculcate humility, reverence, love, and gratitude. What is incomprehensible must be mysterious; but it may be intelligible as far as revealed; and though it connect with things above our reason, it may imply nothing contrary to it. So that, in all respects, the contents of the Bible are suited to convince the serious inquirer, that it is the word of God.

VI. The tendency of the Scripture constitutes another proof of this. Put the case, that all men believed and obeyed the Bible, as a divine revelation; to what conduct would it lead them, and what would be the effect on society? Surely repentance, and renunciation of all vice and immorality, when connected with the spiritual worship of God in his ordinances, faith in his mercy and truth, through the mediation of his Son, and all the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as visible in the lives of every true believer, would form such characters, and produce such effects, as the world hath never yet witnessed! Men would then universally do justice, speak truth, show mercy, exercise mutual forgiveness, follow after peace, bridle their appetites and passions, and lead a sober, righteous, and godly life. Murders, wars, bitter contentions, cruel oppressions, and unrestrained licentiousness, would no more desolate the world, and fill it with misery; but righteousness, goodness, and truth, would bless the earth with a felicity exceeding all our present conceptions. This is, no doubt, the direct tendency of the Scripture doctrines, precepts, motives, and promises; nothing is wanting to remedy the state of the world, and fit men for the worship and felicity of heaven, but that they should believe and obey the Scriptures: and if many enormous crimes have been committed under colour of zeal for Christianity, that only proves the depravity of man's heart: for the Scripture, soberly understood, most expressly forbids such practices; and men do not act thus because they duly regard it, but because they will not believe and obey it.

The tendency of these principles is exhibited in the characters there delineated, whilst the consistency between the truths and precepts of Scripture, and the actions of men recorded in it, implies another argument of its divine original. Ungodly men are characterized, and their actions are recited, according to the abstract account given of human nature; and believers are represented as conducting themselves exactly in that manner, which the principles of the Bible might have led us to expect. They had like passions with other men; but they were habitually restrained and regulated by the fear and love of God, and other holy affections: their general conduct was good, but not perfect; and sometimes their natural proneness to evil broke out, and made way for bitter repentance and deeper humiliation: so that they appear constantly to have perceived their need of forgiveness and divine assistance; to have expected their felicity from the rich mercy of God; and instead of abusing that consideration, to have thence deduced motives for gratitude, zeal, patience, meekness, and love to mankind.

But one character is exhibited in the simplest and most unaffected manner, which is perfection itself. Philosophers, orators, and poets, in their several ways, have bestowed immense pains to describe the character of some man, in such a manner, that no fault could be found in it: and they have given us complete models of their own estimate of excellency, and sufficient proof that they laboured the point to the utmost of their ability. But the four evangelists, whose divine inspiration is now frequently doubted on the most frivolous pretences, without seeming to think of it, have done that which all other writers have failed in. They have shown us a perfect character, by simply relating the words and actions of Christ; without making any comment on them, or showing the least ingenuity in the arrangement of them. This is a fact which cannot be denied; no perfect character is

Digitized by Google

elsewhere delineated; and probably no mere man could have drawn one; no person would have thought of such a character as that of Jesus, yet no flaw or fault can be found in it: this alone, I apprehend, and their entire consistency in this respect with each other, proves, that they wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It hath often been observed, that Satan would never have influenced men to write the Bible; for then he would have been divided against himself: wicked men would not have penned a book, which so awfully condemned their whole conduct; and good men would never have ascribed their own inventions to divine inspiration; especially as such forgeries are most severely reprobated in every part of it. But indeed, it is a work as much exceeding every effort of mere man, as the sun surpasses those scanty illuminations by which his splendour is imitated, or his absence supplied.

VII. The actual effects produced by the Scriptures, evince their divine original. These are indeed far from being equal to their tendency; because, through human depravity, the gospel is not generally believed and obeyed; yet they are very considerable; and we may assert, that even at present, there are many thousands, who have been reclaimed from a profane and immoral life, to sobriety, equity, truth, and piety, and a good behaviour in relative life, by attending to the sacred Scriptures. Having been "made free from sin, and become the servants of God, they have their fruit unto holiness;" and after patiently continuing in well-doing, and cheerfully bearing various afflictions, they joyfully meet death, being supported by the hope of eternal life "as the gift of God through Jesus Christ:" whilst they, who best know them, are most convinced, that they have been rendered wiser, holier, and happier, by believing the Bible; and that there is a reality in religion, though various interests and passions keep them from duly embracing it. There are indeed enthusiasts also; but they become so, by forsaking the *old* rule of faith and duty, for some *new* fancy: and there are hypocrites; but they attest the reality and excellency of religion, by deeming it worth their while to counterfeit it.

VIII. Brevity is so connected with fulness in the scriptures, that they are a treasure of divine knowledge, which can never be exhausted. The things that are absolutely necessary to salvation, are few, simple, and obvious to the meanest capacity, provided it be attended by an humble, teachable disposition: but the most learned, acute, and diligent student, cannot in the longest life obtain an entire knowledge of this one volume. The deeper he works the mine, the richer and more abundant he finds the ore; new light continually beams from this source of heavenly knowledge, to direct his conduct, and illustrate the works of God, and the ways of men; and he will at last leave the world confessing, that the more he studied the Scriptures, the greater sense he had of his own ignorance and of their inestimable value.

Lastly. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." The discoveries which he hath made by the light of the Scripture; the experience he hath had that the Lord fulfils its promises to those who trust in them; the abiding effects produced by attending to it, on his judgment, dispositions, and affections; and the earnests of heaven enjoyed by him in communion with God, according to the way revealed in it, put the matter beyond all doubt: and though many believers are not qualified to dispute against infidels, they are enabled, through this inward testimony, to obey and suffer for the gospel; and they can no more be convinced by reasonings and objections, that men invented the Bible, than they can be persuaded that men created the sun, whose light they behold, and by whose beams they are cheered.

And now, if an objector could fully invalidate one half, or two thirds of these arguments (to which many more might easily be added), the remainder would be abundantly sufficient; nay, perhaps, any one of them so far decides the question, that were there no more proof of the Bible's being the word of God, a man could not reject it, without acting contrary to those dictates of common sense, which direct his conduct in his secular affairs.

Digitized by Google

But, in reality, I have a confidence that not one of them can be fairly answered; at least it has never yet been done: and the combined force of the whole is so great, that the objections by which men cavil against the truth, only resemble the foaming waves dashing against the deep rooted rock, which hath for ages defied their unavailing fury. But though these can effect nothing more, they may beat off the poor shipwrecked mariner, who was about to ascend it, in hopes of deliverance from impending destruction.

The consequences of our present conduct, according to the Scriptures, are so vast, that if there were only a bare possibility of their truth, it would be madness to run the risk of rejecting them, for the sake of gaining the whole world. What then is it, when we have such unanswerable demonstrations, that they are the word of God, and cannot reasonably doubt of it for a moment, to disobey the commands, and neglect the salvation revealed in it, for the veriest trifle that can be proposed to us? Especially as it may be shown, that (besides the eternal consequences) the firm belief of, and conscientious obedience to the Scriptures, will render a man happier in this present life, even amidst trials and self-denying services, than any other man can be made, by all the pomp, pleasure, wealth, power, and honour, which the world can bestow on him!

ESSAY II.

On the Importance of Revealed Truth; the duty of Reading the Scriptures, and the manner in which it should be performed.

As the Bible may be unanswerably proved to be the word of God, we should reason from it as from self-evident principles, or demonstrated axioms; for "his testimony is sure, and giveth wisdom to the simple."

Many parts of Scripture accord so well with the conclusions of our rational powers, when duly exercised, that either they might have been known without revelation, or else men have mistaken the capacity of *perceiving* truth, for that of *discovering* it. Hence various controversies have arisen about "*natural religion*," which many suppose to be rather taken for granted, than made known by revelation. But the term is ambiguous: for the word *natural* includes *the propensities of our hearts*, as well as *the powers of our understandings*; and the same truths which accord to the latter, are often totally opposite to the former: the Gentiles might have known many things concerning God and his will, if they had "liked to retain Him in their knowledge." So that, "*the religion of reason*" would express the idea much more intelligibly, if any such distinction be deemed necessary.

This, however, is obvious, that many truths and precepts which are found in the Bible, have been maintained by persons who were ignorant of, or rejected that divine revelation, or who chose not to own their obligations to it: and many others, professing to receive the Scriptures as the word of God, assent to some truths contained in them, not so much because they are revealed, as because they think that they may be proved by other arguments: whereas they reject, neglect, or explain away those doctrines which are not thus evident to their own reason, or level with their capacities. So that at last it comes to this, that they discard all that is deemed peculiar to revelation; and refuse to believe the testimony of God, if reason will not vouch for the truth of what he says.

It may indeed be questioned, whether those opinions which men so confidently magnify as the oracles of reason, were not originally, without exception, borrowed from revelation, as far as there is any truth in them: and it is evident, that they cannot possess sufficient certainty, clearness, and authority to render them efficacious principles of action, except as they are en-

Digitized by Google

forced by revelation, and its awful sanctions. And the wildest enthusiast never dreamed of a grosser absurdity, than they maintain who suppose that the only wise God hath given a revelation to man, confirmed by miracles and prophecies, and established in the world by the labours and sufferings of his servants, and the crucifixion of his well-beloved Son; and that this revelation at last is found to contain nothing, but what we might have known as well without it! Nay, that it is expressed in such language, as hath given occasion to those who have most implicitly believed and reverentially obeyed it, to maintain sentiments and adopt practices erroneous and evil in themselves, and of fatal consequence to mankind!

We might therefore, *a priori*, have expected, that a revelation from God should illustrate, confirm, and enforce such things as seem more level to our natural powers; and that it should make known to us many important matters, which we could not have otherwise discovered, and which would be found exceedingly different from our previous notions and imaginations: seeing that our contracted views and limited capacities are infinitely distant from the omniscience of God. So that it is most reasonable to conclude, that the doctrinal truths which more immediately relate to the Divine nature, perfections, providence, and government; the invisible and eternal world; and the mysteries of redemption, &c., constitute by far the most important part of revelation; as discovering to us such things "as no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither have they ever entered into the heart of man to conceive;" and yet they are essentially connected with our present hope, worship, and duty, and with our future happiness or misery.

He therefore cannot, according to the common use of language, be called a believer, who only holds those doctrines which he deems the dictates of reason, as well as of revelation; whilst he rejects the testimony of God, whenever he *deems it unreasonable:* and we may hence learn what judgment to form of those who affirm, without hesitation, that the moral precepts and sanctions, with the more evident truths of the Bible, are the only important part of it; that it is of little consequence what men believe, especially concerning those things which are in any degree mysterious; and that none but narrow bigots and weak and ignorant people lay any stress upon speculative opinions. "He that believeth not, maketh God a liar," especially he that believeth not the testimony which God hath given of his Son, and of eternal life bestowed on sinners through him, (John iii. 12—21; 31—36; 1 John v. 9—12). This is the uniform doctrine of Scripture; and to contradict it is equivalent to a total rejection of divine revelation. Can it be supposed, that the prophets and apostles were commissioned; and that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh, died on the cross, and rose from the dead, merely to inform mankind, that the Lord approved honesty, temperance, truth, and kindness, and disapproved the contrary vices? Or that the unnumbered testimonies which the Scriptures contain, to the mysteries of the Divine Nature, the Person of the Redeemer, and the work of redemption, &c., may, without any criminality, be disbelieved, derided, or reviled; provided men are moral in their conduct towards one another? Or that God is equally pleased with those that thus affront his veracity, as with them who implicitly submit to his teaching, and credit his testimony? If this be the case, in what does the difference between the infidel and the believer consist? All, except avowed atheists, will allow the propriety of many precepts, and the truth of some doctrines, coinciding with those contained in Scripture: but the infidel admits them as the dictates of reason, not as the testimony of God; and the pretended believer rejects all, without hesitation, that appears not to accord with the same standard. So that both of them believe their own reasonings, "lean to their own understandings," and "make God a liar," when his testimony contradicts their self-confident decisions? It appears, therefore, that the prevailing notion of the little importance of doctrinal truth is subversive of revelation; and in fact is only a more plausible and more dangerous species of infidelity.

Digitized by Google

If we believe the Scriptures to have been written by inspiration from God, and have any suitable apprehensions of his omniscience, veracity, and other perfections; we must be convinced that it is the height of arrogance for us, short-sighted erring creatures of yesterday, to speak of any doctrine contained in them, as false or doubtful, because it is not coincident with our reasonings or conceptions. Surely a small portion of modesty and humility might suffice to induce our confession, that we are more likely to be mistaken than the only wise God! And yet we must, in rejecting his authenticated testimony, either advance our knowledge above his omniscience, or impeach his veracity, or deny the Scriptures altogether or in part, to be his word; reserving to ourselves the infallible determination, what part is of divine authority, and what is not! And if we deem any part of the Scriptures, though true, to be of little or no importance, or of bad tendency; what do we but affront the infinite wisdom or goodness of God, as if he did not know what truths were proper to be revealed to man; or as if he purposely discovered those matters which it would have been better for mankind never to have known? And seeing it is evident that the Lord hath in the Scriptures required the belief of certain doctrines, as absolutely necessary to salvation; to insinuate that these doctrines are either false, doubtful, or of no value, must involve in it the grossest and most affronting blasphemy imaginable.

We do not indeed maintain, that all the truths of revelation are of equal importance; because they are not stated in Scripture to be so: but none can be wholly unimportant: and we are not always competent to decide upon their comparative value. Some things are more obvious than others; and such as are more hard to be understood are not so well adapted to those persons, "who are unstable and unlearned" in the school of Christ: yet we are not authorised to reject, or even to doubt any of them. We may indeed demur as to the true interpretation of them: whilst in humble, reverent teachableness, we wait for clearer light upon the subject; and we must remain for some time in partial ignorance or error; because we cannot at once become acquainted with all the truths, which are revealed to faith, even when we have got a disposition implicitly to believe them. There are some things which relate to the very life and essence of true religion; others are rather necessary to our stability, comfort, and holy conduct: these we must by no means reject or treat with indifference; but it is possible, that, to the last, we may be mistaken in, or ignorant of some of them; and yet be found among the heirs of salvation.

The importance of revealed truth may be shown in another way; for it is the seed of principle in the soul, whence all inward and real holiness proceeds. "Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth." (John xvii. 17—19). "Beholding as in a glass," (namely in the doctrine of Christ,) "the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image," (2 Cor. iii. 18; iv. 3—6). "Without controversy, great is *the mystery of godliness*, God was manifest in the flesh," &c. This doctrine was, in the judgment of the apostle, "the great mystery *of godliness*;" and indeed all holy dispositions and affections towards God, all the genuine spiritual worship, all the willing obedience of filial love, and all the cheerful acquiescence in the Divine will, and affiance on the Divine truth and mercy, which have been found in the world since the fall of man, have arisen from a proper perception of this great truth, and the doctrines connected with it. Spirituality (or a delight in and supreme valuation of the holy excellency of spiritual things, and a disposition to seek pleasure and satisfaction in religion), is intimately connected with a believing dependence on the promised influences of the Holy Spirit; and that view of the worth of the soul, the evil of sin, the justice and mercy of God, the vanity of the world, and the believer's obligations to a Saviour, who loved him, "and redeemed him to God with his blood," which the doctrine of the cross communicates, is fundamental to deep repentance, genuine humility, gratitude, patience, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, love of enemies, and other parts of the Christian temper and character. With-

Digitized by Google

out this, a proud morality, and a pharisaical task and form of godliness, will comprise the sum total of man's religion; except as he is brought under those impressions and leadings, which will in time influence him to embrace "the truth as it is in Jesus." This will appear more fully, and be proved more at large in the subsequent Essays. The importance of revealed truth, therefore, may be evidently perceived, both from the authority of Him who speaks to us in the Scripture; the various methods he has taken to confirm the words of his servants; and the tendency and efficacy of sound doctrine, to produce spiritual affections and holy obedience.

Indeed the doctrines of Scripture may be received by a dead faith into the understanding *as true*, whilst the heart does not embrace them *as good*; and then "they will be held in unrighteousness." But a real and living belief of the great doctrines contained in the Bible is the proper root of true holiness. "A whited sepulchre" is the emblem of all that can be attained to, where they are proudly rejected, or treated with indifference; and every man's spirituality, piety, humility, and enlarged, disinterested, unostentatious philanthropy, will bear proportion to the degree in which he knows and cordially embraces the great truths of the holy Scriptures.

It must, therefore, be evident, that every person to whom the Scriptures are sent, ought to study them, and get acquainted with their contents. For if God, in compassion to our ignorance and love to our souls, as well as in regard to the honour of his own name and government, hath given us a book penned under the inspiration of his Holy Spirit; and if the truths revealed in it be of the greatest importance; it must be most reasonable that we should bestow pains to acquire the knowledge of them. Whether we consider the Scriptures as a revelation which the Lord hath made to us of himself, that we may know, worship, and glorify him; or of his law and government, that we may submit to and obey him, or learn from them our true condition as sinners; or of his mercy and salvation, that we may find acceptance with him; or of the privileges of his children, in this life and that which is to come: in every view of the subject, the duty of searching them must be manifest. Nor can we neglect it, without avowing, that we despise the knowledge of God and heavenly things; that we do not desire to serve our Creator; that we neither value his favour nor fear his frown; or that we can discover the way of peace and happiness without his instruction. Nothing, therefore, can be more expressive of our ingratitude, rebellion, and alienation from God, than the general neglect of the Bible, which prevails among those that profess to believe it to be his word.

Doth he then speak from heaven to us sinners about the way of eternal salvation? and shall we refuse to hear his gracious words? Does he give us a book to teach us to be happy in this world and for ever? and shall we not study it? Does he make known to us mortals, those glories which angels adore with unceasing rapture? and shall we turn away with contemptuous aversion? Hath he provided for us sinners such a redemption, as sinless "angels desire to look into?" and shall we think the subject unworthy of our notice? Who can pretend to justify this conduct? Yet how much more pains do lawyers, physicans, and other students, who desire to excel in their professions, bestow in poring over voluminous authors, than men, called Christians, do in searching the Scriptures? Yea, how many give a decided preference to amusing and ingenious trifles, or political discussions (not to say publications suited to corrupt their principles and morals), above the sacred word of God. They would be ashamed not to have read some admired or popular author, though the work perhaps be wholly useless (if not worse); yet they remain, year after year, unacquainted with the holy Scriptures! "Surely in vain is the word of the Lord given to them; the pen of the scribes is in vain" (Jer. viii. 8, 9).

It cannot be necessary, in such a compendious essay, to show particularly how the study of the Scriptures is inculcated in every part of the sacred volume. Let the more attentive reader turn to what Moses spake to Israel

Digitized by Google

(Deut. vi. 6—9; xi. 18, 19), what the Psalmist teaches (Psalm i, xix, cxix), and Solomon (Prov. ii. 1—6), and what is contained in the following passages of the New Testament (John v. 39, 40; Acts xvii. 11; 2 Tim. ii. 15—17). Indeed the apostles and evangelists always reasoned from and appealed to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and suppose the Jews to be acquainted with them; and the penmen of the New assure us "those things were written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing we might have life through his name," (John xx. 31).

The case then is plain, that our obligation to search the Scriptures is indispensable; and that it is a duty of the greatest importance. Every person, therefore, who allows them to be the infallible word of God, must be convicted in his own conscience of acting in an unreasonable and criminal manner, if he do not diligently study them: and the general neglect of men in this great concern, manifestly proves them not to be fully satisfied, that the Bible was given by inspiration from God, and that it reveals the only way of peace and salvation. We do not urge men to believe without evidence; but we call upon them humbly and seriously to examine the proofs afforded them, that the Scriptures are the word of God; and then to bestow pains to learn the religion contained in them, and to compare the doctrine we propose with that unerring standard, from which we profess to have learned it. Nor can we doubt, but they will be left speechless at the day of judgement, who will not comply with such requisitions, whatever excuses or pretences they may make at present. This being determined, it may be useful to give a few directions to those who are convinced of their duty in this particular; and desire to attend to it with profit to themselves, or those placed under their care.

I. Examine the whole of the sacred Scriptures. I do not mean, that the same degree of attention and time should be employed about every part of the Bible: some things are but more *remotely* useful to us; some are easily understood and applied; others require more close and frequent investigation; whilst the obscurity of some passages (especially to unlearned readers) renders them less adapted to their edification. Yet every part of the sacred oracles has its use, and throws light upon the rest: and as preachers very properly make their appeal to the Scriptures, in support of their doctrines; so the hearers cannot so well judge how far their arguments are conclusive, unless they have a competent acquaintance with the whole of them. Nor is the Bible so large a book, but that even they, who have not much leisure, may, in process of time, get a general knowledge of it in every part; if they bestow a measure of diligence, proportioned to the value of the acquisition: and as "all Scripture is given by inspiration from God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" so every word demands a measure of our attention. It is, therefore, a very great hindrance to edification, when serious persons rest satisfied with text books, and abstracts from Scripture, or with a few favourite passages, that are continually resorted to, whilst the rest of God's word is little regarded; and above all, those parts are neglected which teach men the particulars of the Christian temper, and of those duties in which they are most deficient.

It hath been found very useful by many to divide the Bible into two or three parts, and to read a portion from each of them in order, in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, as people have leisure and opportunity; allowing a larger measure of time to the New Testament, or devotional parts of the Old; and reading these wholly, or principally, on the Lord's day, or other seasons set apart for religion. This, in a course of years, will bring a man familiarly acquainted with the whole Scriptures. And though singing the praises of God very properly forms a part of family worship, where both can be attended to; yet reading the Scriptures in course (with a few exceptions, at the discretion of him who officiates) seems a most valuable method of preparing the minds of children and servants for profiting by public in-

Digitized by Google

struction, as well as for giving them a comprehensive view of our holy religion.

It is also very advantageous to ministers, and others who have much leisure, to vary their method of reading: at some times going through a larger portion, with a more general regard to the scope of the sacred writer: at others, minutely examining every word and sentence in a smaller portion; its connection with the context, and coincidence with other Scriptures: and to mark well the harmony and mutual subserviency of every part of divine truth; the proportion of one part to another; the distinct parts of which the whole consists, and the way in which the several subjects are stated, handled, arranged, and expressed.

II. Search the Scriptures *daily*. Divine truth is the food of the soul, which wants its nourishment as often as the body does. That day must have been misspent, in which no part of the Scriptures has been read, or meditated on; we should therefore redeem time from indolence, recreation, useless visits, trifling conversation, &c., for this employment: and then no *lawful* business would prevent any one from finding a little leisure, morning and evening at least, for reading some portion of the scripture; which would furnish the mind with subjects for meditation, when not necessarily engrossed about other matters, to the exclusion of vain thoughts and polluting imaginations. The more habitual this practice becomes, the greater pleasure will it afford: and even the old Christian will not think that his knowledge renders it superfluous, or seek an excuse for omitting it; but will apply to it as a healthful person craves and relishes his food. I would especially enforce it upon the consciences of the young, not to let any day begin or end, without reading carefully a portion of Scripture: this will become in a short time a most useful habit; and if they are abridged of a little sleep by this means, their bodies will not be injured, and their minds will be improved by it. It may also be observed, that hearing sermons, reading religious books, or joining in pious discourse, will often mislead, and seldom profit those, who do not compare the whole with the sacred Scriptures, by "daily searching them, to know whether things are so or no."

III. Read the Bible with the express purpose of appropriating the information communicated by it, from God to man. When we have humbly and attentively considered and ascertained the meaning of any proposition, we should implicitly believe it, how contrary soever it may be to our former opinion, or that of others in reputation for wisdom. We ought to reverence the authority, omniscience, veracity, and faithfulness of the Lord, who speaks to us in his word; not doubting the truth or importance of any of his instructions, but studying the meaning of them in docility and patience. Thus imbibing wisdom and knowledge from their source, through the appointed medium, we shall grow more learned in divine things than any teachers or aged students, who lean to their own understandings, (Psalm cxix. 98—100); even as the bosom friend of the prince, who learns his secrets from his own lips, will know more of his designs than any conjectural politicians can do, though their sagacity and abilities be far superior to his.

IV. Use helps, in searching the Scriptures, but do not depend on them. The labours of those pious men, who have spent their lives in studying and elucidating the sacred oracles, may be very profitable to those who either have less leisure or ability, or who are newly engaged in such researches: and it savours of self-sufficiency to undervalue either commentators or other writers on divine things. Yet all men are fallible, and we should call no man teacher upon earth: it must, therefore, be proper to compare all their elucidations or inferences with the Scriptures themselves. Above all, it behoves us "to ask wisdom of God;" and to beg of him to give us the Holy Spirit, to remove from our minds every prejudice and carnal affection, and whatever may close them against any part of revealed truth, or indispose them to receive the illumination of heaven (as the vitiated eye cannot make proper use of the light of the sun). He alone, who inspired the Scriptures,

Digitized by Google

can help us to understand them: and if we search them in dependence on, and prayer for, his teaching, he will lead us into all truth, as far as our safety, peace, and duty require it. It may be proper here to caution the reader against fanciful interpretations, which surprise and amuse, but mislead men from the practical meaning of Scripture: and against those, who pretend to *modernise* divine truth; not choosing to "speak according to the oracles of God;" but as they suppose the apostles would have done, if they had possessed the advantage of modern improvements: a supposition just as wise, as to attempt improving the light of the sun by astronomy! In short, every text has its proper meaning, as it stands related to the context; and its proper application to us: these we should seriously investigate, with fervent prayer for divine teaching; without presuming to add to, alter, or deduct from, the revealed will of God (Deut. xxix, 29).

Lastly, We shall search the Scriptures, as the navigator consults his chart, and makes his observations; that he may discover where he is, and what course he must steer: or as any one looks into a glass, that he may both know what manner of man he is, and learn to adjust what is unbecoming: or as an heir reads his father's will, and the inventory of his effects and estates; that he may know what the inheritance is, and the nature of the tenure by which he must possess it. We should accompany our reading with impartial self-examination; both in respect of our knowledge, judgement, dispositions, affections, motives, words, and actions, in every particular, at present and in times past; that we may learn the state and wants of our souls; and with self-application, as the persons spoken to, in every instruction, precept, sanction, counsel, warning, invitation, promise, &c.; according to our state, character, conduct, and circumstances: pausing to inquire, whether we have understood what we have read, and what we learned from it; that, beseeching the Lord to pardon what is past, and to help us for the future, we may, without delay or reserve, begin to practise what we know, waiting for further light in such matters as still continue doubtful or obscure to us. It would be easy to multiply directions; but the Scriptures thus studied are "able to make us wise unto salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ."

ESSAY III.

On the Scripture Character of God.

EVERY attentive and intelligent student of the Bible will perceive, that revelation was vouchsafed to man, in order to deliver or preserve him from idolatry, by instructing him in the character and perfections of the one living and true God, and the way in which he would be worshipped; as well as to teach other duties, and to influence him to perform them. The jealous care of Jehovah to distinguish betwixt himself and every idol, to secure the glory to himself, without allowing any of it to be given to another, and the terrible denunciations pronounced against, and severe judgments executed upon, idolators, must attract the notice of all who are conversant with the sacred oracles, and convince every impartial person, that idolatry is the greatest of all sins, atheism alone excepted.

Yet in this, as in other things, the "wisdom of man (which is foolishness with God)," has led numbers to adopt a contrary opinion: so that, whilst an elegant and admired poet hath employed his fascinating ingenuity to persuade mankind, that God is worshipped with equal acceptance "by saint, by savage, and by sage," or whether he be called "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord *,"

* Pope's Universal Prayer.

Digitized by Google

(which in this connection may signify Baal); it is also become a fashionable principle of modern rational divinity, that all such distinctions are immaterial, and all religions very much alike, if men be sincere in their way. So that numbers seem to think *what they call bigotry* (though wholly free from intolerance or persecution) to be worse than any mental errors; even in respect of the object of religious worship: and that candour and liberality of sentiment are more important virtues than the supreme love and spiritual adoration of Jehovah, as distinguished from all false gods!

But who does not perceive, that this principle, if carried to its obvious consequences, amounts to a rejection of the Bible, or at least puts it on the same footing with Hesiod's Theogonia, or the Koran? Who can avoid seeing, that it imputes bigotry and a contradicted mind to the prophets and apostles, and to every approved character of holy writ, without excepting that of our Lord himself? Nay, will it not follow from it, that Jehovah wrought many stupendous miracles to no manner of purpose? For we must not only inquire, why Moses was so careful to distinguish the God of Israel from the idols of Egypt and of the nations? or what induced David to expect assistance in meeting Goliath, who despised the armies of Jehovah, "that all the earth might know that there was a God in Israel?" (1 Sam. xvii. 45—47,) or on what account Elijah was so earnest to determine whether the Lord or Baal were the true God? (1 Kings xviii.) but we must also demand, why he answered their expectations and prayers by miraculous interpositions, if the point to be decided were of little or no importance?

When the God of Hezekiah delivered him from the power of the Assyrians, by the slaughter of one hundred and eighty-five thousand men, whilst Sennacherib was slain by his own sons in the house and worship of Nisroch *his god*; the distinction between Jehovah and every idol was strongly marked. These are a few, out of very numerous instances and evidences, which might be brought from the Old Testament, to confirm the point in question. When our Lord told the woman of Samaria, that "her nation knew not what they worshipped, for salvation was of the Jews" (John iv. 22—24); when Paul proposed to declare unto the polite and philosophical Athenians, that "unknown God, whom they ignorantly worshipped," and to distinguish the Creator and Judge of the world from all their idols (Acts xvii. 23—31); and when he informed the Corinthians that their idol sacrifices were offered unto devils, and not to God (1 Cor. x. 20); they plainly showed, that such candour, as is now contended for, was no part of their plan, but absolutely incompatible with it.

Indeed, the apostle has informed us, that idolatry originated from men's aversion to God; "they liked not to retain him in their knowledge" (Rom. i. 18—23. 28). His holy character and spiritual service suited not with their carnal minds; and therefore deities were invented of another sort, and a worship coincident with their corrupt inclinations. When we consider how Christian festivals are generally celebrated, we shall cease to wonder, that Israel preferred the golden calf to Jehovah, and joyfully "sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play," instead of attending the sacred ordinances of the living God: and a competent knowledge of human nature will enable us easily to account for the predilection, which that people ever manifested for the gods of the nations, and their jovial and licentious rites. For the religion of the Gentiles, instead of producing any salutary effect on their conduct, led them to practise the grossest enormities, not only without remorse, but in order to appease or find acceptance with their deities; and thus it tended to corrupt both their principles and morals. No doubt, the great enemy of God and man, both from ambition of engrossing the worship of idolators, and from the malignity of his nature, aided their invention, in forming the characters and imagining the exploits of their deities, partly in resemblance to his own abominable propensities, and partly according to the worst vices of mankind: that so the most destructive crimes might be sanctioned, and the vilest affections, as it were, consecrated, by conformity to

Digitized by Google

the objects of their worship. No wonder that they were ferocious in war, and debauched in their general conduct, when their religious observances comprised the most savage cruelties, the most shameless licentiousness, and the greatest excesses of intemperance; and when at last they could not equal in these respects, the gods whom they had invented for themselves!

Indeed, if religion be supposed to produce any effect on the conduct of mankind, every person of common sense must allow, that the character and actions ascribed to the object of worship, must be of the greatest possible importance: for as *these* are, so will the *sincere* worshipper be. To please, to resemble, to imitate the object of adoration, must be the supreme aim and ambition of every devotee; whether of Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus, Venus, Moloch, or Mammon; as well as of every spiritual worshipper of Jehovah: and we may, therefore, know what to expect from every man, if we are acquainted with his sentiments concerning the God that he adores: provided we can ascertain the degree in which he is *sincere* and *earnest* in his religion. It would be absurd to expect much honesty from him, who *devotedly* worshipped Mercury as the god of thieving; much mercy from a devotee of Moloch; love of peace from the worshipper of Mars; or chastity from the priestess of Venus: and, whatever philosophical speculators may imagine, both the Scriptures and profane history (ancient and modern) show, that the bulk of mankind, in heathen nations, were far more sincere in, and influenced by their absurd idolatries, than professed Christians are by the Bible; because they are more congenial to corrupt nature. Nay, it is a fact, that immense multitudes of human sacrifices are, at this day, annually offered according to the rules of a dark superstition; and various other flagrant immoralities sanctioned by religion amongst these idolaters, who have been erroneously considered as the most inoffensive of the human race. But these proportional effects on the moral character of mankind are not peculiar to gross idolatry: if men fancy that they worship the true God alone, and yet form a wrong notion of his character and perfections, they only substitute a more refined idolatry in the place of Paganism, and worship the creature of their own imagination, though not the work of their own hands: and in what doth such an *ideal* being, though called Jehovah, differ from that called Jupiter, or Baal? The character ascribed to him may indeed come nearer the truth than the other, and the delusion may be more refined: but if it essentially differ from the Scripture character of God, the effect must be the same, in a measure, as to those who earnestly desire to imitate, resemble, and please the object of their adoration.

Indeed, when sinful men presume to delineate the character of God for themselves, however learned or sagacious they may be, their reasonings will inevitably be warped by the general depravity of fallen nature, and by their own peculiar prejudices and vices. Partial to themselves, and indulgent to their master passion (which perhaps they mistake for an excellency), they will naturally ascribe to the Deity what they value in themselves, and suppose him lenient to such things as *they* indulge and excuse: they will be sure to arrange their plan in such a manner, as to conclude themselves the objects of his complacency, and entitled to his favour; or at least not deserving his abhorrence, and exposed to his avenging justice: they will consider *their own* judgment of what is fit and right, as the measure and rule of *his* government: their religious worship will accord to such mistaken conclusions; and the effect of their faith upon their conduct will be inconsiderable, or prejudicial. Thus men "think that God is altogether such a one as themselves," (Psalm l. 21), and a self-flattering, carnalized religion is substituted for the humbling, holy, and spiritual gospel of Christ.

The different ideas which men form of God, (whilst the Scripture character of him is overlooked), result from the various dispositions and propensities which they derive from constitution, education, and habit: the voluptuary will imagine (with a certain dissolute monarch *), that God will not

* Charles II.

Digitized by Google

damn a man for taking "a little pleasure in an irregular manner:" nor can the ambitious warrior, or covetous oppressor be convinced, that the supreme Being will demand a strict account of all the blood shed, or the injustice committed in their respective pursuits: a speculating philosopher may imagine a deity too dignified to notice the conduct, or too clement to punish the crimes of puny mortals; at least he will deem him very favourable to the self-wise, and such as are superior to vulgar prejudices, whatever he may do in respect of debauchees and sanguinary tyrants. Thus men's ideas of God are framed according to their own prevailing propensities; and then those ideas of him reciprocally tend to form their characters, and influence their conduct, both in respect of religious duties, and in the common concerns of life.

These observations suffice to show us the reason why "the world by wisdom knew not God," and to prove, that it is impossible in the very nature of things for a fallen creature to know him, except by revelation, and by faith appropriating the instruction which is thus vouchsafed: for self-love and carnal affections will so bias the mind as to defeat the design of the most patient investigation, and to deduce erroneous conclusions from the most accurate, and apparently most impartial reasonings upon this subject; except as they are conducted with a constant regard to the revelation which God hath made of himself.

Thus the Jews *knew* not the God they zealously worshipped: they totally mistook his character, and therefore they despised and rejected "the effulgency of his glory," and the express image of his invisible perfection; and they hated and persecuted, *most conscientiously*, his spiritual worshippers, (John viii. 54, 55; xv. 21—24; xvi. 3). If we would, therefore, know God in a saving and sanctifying manner, (John xvii. 3; 2 Cor. iii. 18; iv. 3—6), we must not "lean to our own understandings," nor "trust in our own hearts;" we must not resort to the schools, or sit at the feet of renowned philosophers, ancient or modern: but we must apply to the word of God himself, that we may thence learn, in humble teachableness and implicit faith, what we ought to think of his perfections, and the glory and harmony of them; remembering, that "his testimony is sure, and giveth wisdom to the simple;" and likewise, "that no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him," (Matt. xi. 25—30.)

If then we carefully "search the Scriptures," we shall find that this subject constitutes a principal part of their contents; and that the Lord makes himself known to us in two ways. 1. By express declarations; and 2. By his works and dispensations, as illustrating and exemplifying his declarations. A few hints on each of these will constitute the remaining part of this Essay; it being chiefly intended to assist the serious student of the Scriptures, in profitably considering this important subject, as he proceeds with his daily researches.

I. We consider the Lord's express declarations concerning himself. There is a majesty in the passages of holy writ, that relate to the natural perfections of God, which vastly exceeds whatever is admired as sublime in Pagan writers. Jehovah speaks of himself, "as the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity;" "heaven is his throne, and the earth his footstool;" "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him;" all "nations before Him are as nothing, they are counted to him as less than nothing and vanity;" "from everlasting to everlasting he is God;" "the Almighty, the All-sufficient God;" "His wisdom is infinite;" "there is no searching of his understanding;" "He knoweth all things, he searcheth the hearts of all the children of men;" yea, knoweth their thoughts afar off;" there is no fleeing from his presence;" "the light and darkness to him are both alike;" "He dwelleth in light inaccessible, no man hath seen or can see him;" "He doeth what he will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;" "His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever;" "He

Digitized by Google

is most blessed for evermore;" for "with him is no change or shadow of turning." These, and numberless other declarations, expressly and emphatically ascribe eternity, self-existence, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, incomprehensible greatness and majesty, and essential felicity and glory in full perfection to the Lord our God.

But in this respect their declarations do not so materially differ from the deductions of man's reason on this subject, or at least from what it approves and allows; and it is principally to be observed, that such an infinite Agent can, with most perfect ease, superintend the affairs, whether vast or minute, of the universe: whereas, some philosophers have supposed that such an attention would be either a degradation or an incumbrance to him; thus virtually ascribing to him imperfection, and attempting to deprive him of his throne, as if he were not qualified to fill it! But as infinite power, knowledge, and greatness, if they could subsist without infinite truth, justice, and goodness, would be terrible indeed beyond conception, yet not at all adorable or amiable; so these natural perfections do not so much constitute any part of the Divine character, as define and describe Him to whom it belongs. Accordingly we continually read in the sacred Scriptures, that Jehovah "is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." "He is (not only) a God of knowledge;" but "by him actions are weighed;" "a God of truth without iniquity; just and right is he." "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "for he is of purer eyes than to behold evil." So that he is declared to be both infinitely holy in his nature, and unalterably righteous in his government of the world: for "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; he will take vengeance on his adversaries," &c. (Nah. i. 2—6). We are indeed told by speculating men, that such expressions are only an accommodation to human infirmity, and that there are no such passions in the Divine nature. Now, if this merely were intended to direct our interpretation of them, and to remind us, that all that perturbation which anger and revenge excite in our minds, and all those effects which flow from them, were to be excluded from our apprehensions of the Deity, it would be very proper. But surely the only wise God knows best how to speak of himself; and we may safely "speak according to his oracles." Abhorrence of evil, and indignation against evil doers, are not sinful passions, but requisite to a holy character; and to execute vengeance on criminals is the indispensable duty of a ruler. We pretend not to explain how these things subsist in, and are executed by the Divine mind; but we know who hath said, "vengeance is mine, and I will recompense;" and we hesitate not to repeat his words, without attempting to explain away their awful import.

When we have added to this delineation, the enlarged goodness and liberality of the Lord, who delighteth in communicating being and blessedness, and "openeth his hand to fill all things living with plenteousness;" we perceive a character completely amiable, adorable, and glorious, and peculiarly animating to all obedient creatures; and must allow the reasonableness of the command, "thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart," &c. Yet is it most tremendous to sinners, who must be discouraged, and verge to despair, in proportion as they become acquainted with it; except as they attend to the discovery of his plenteous, rich, and everlasting mercy. Mercy respects misery, and transgression as the cause of it; it pities and relieves misery, and pardons sin; and without this attribute, even the providential goodness of God would tend to aggravate our guilt, and increase our condemnation. Mercy, therefore, is in Scripture spoken of, as the peculiar glory of God, and the grand subject of the believer's confidence, joy, and grateful praise. Yet when the Lord proclaims his name as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering, ready to forgive," &c. he commonly gives some intimation, "that he will by no means clear the guilty," or the impenitent and unbelieving, (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Nah. i. 2—7; Rom. iii. 19—31; 2 Pet. ii. 4—9): and all his declarations of compassion and love to

Digitized by Google

sinners, connect with his holy abhorrence of, and righteous indignation against their sins; and contain some intimations of that change, which his grace effects in those who share his pardoning love. Yet even this would be insufficient to render the exercise of mercy, (especially in that extent spoken of in Scripture) consistent with the perfection of his holiness and justice: for should mercy be shown to such as merit vengeance (without any provision made on that behalf), justice would appear imperfect, its rights violated, and its glory eclipsed; the law would be in a measure degraded, and the Divine purity would not shine forth in its full splendour. Some intimations, therefore, were given from the beginning, that mercy would be exercised in harmony with justice; and that Jehovah would, through the promised Seed, be "a just God and a Saviour;" yet, under the old dispensation, his servants seem rather to have believed that it would be so, than to have had clear perceptions of the mysterious way in which it would be effected; but the New Testament hath removed the veil from the subject itself, provided the veil do not still remain upon our hearts. This, however, seems to be the only way in which the Divine character could be displayed to us, in all its glory: at least, all created understanding must for ever have proved incapable of conceiving, in what way the largest exercise of pardon and love to the vilest sinners could consist with, and illustrate the infinite justice and holiness of God, and establish his law in honour and authority. Infinite wisdom alone could devise a plan adequate to these purposes; it must spring from boundless love; and we may be sure, that the plan revealed to us was the most approved of all that were possible, by infinite wisdom and love.

Every intimation, therefore, of a Messiah, a Mediator, a mercy-seat, a high priest, or an atoning sacrifice, should lead our minds to the great doctrine of redemption through Emmanuel's blood, as the central point in which every part of the revelation God hath made of himself to man must meet. But without farther anticipating this part of the subject, we may observe, that the Scriptures everywhere describe our God as perfect in wisdom, holiness, justice, truth, goodness, and mercy in all its manifold exercises; they represent these attributes as the glory of his nature, and as constituting him the proper object of our supreme love, adoration, and service; as all harmonizing in his consummate character, and each of them subserving the exercise and glory of all the rest.

II. In more exactly investigating the Scriptures, we find these attributes exemplified in the works and dispensations recorded of our God. The display of his omnipotence, and other natural perfections, in the works of creation; or the miracles he wrought in delivering his servants, or punishing his enemies, is too obvious to need a particular discussion in this place: nor is it requisite to enlarge on his providential goodness. But that combination of justice, holiness, truth, and mercy, which hath been stated as comprising the character of God, is manifested in his dealings with his rational creatures. Infinite in holiness and justice, "he spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell." He denounced on fallen Adam and his race, the awful sentence, "dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return;" and unnumbered millions have been swept into the grave, by most dire and torturing diseases. The destruction of the old world by the deluge; that of Sodom, &c. by fire; the plagues of Egypt; the vengeance executed on the Canaanites; and all the judgments inflicted on the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, in the promised land, and through every age, are such exhibitions of these awful attributes, that our minds *naturally* turn from the narrative with aversion; nor can any man fully understand them, till he hath acquired a deep sense of the evil of sin, and the justice of God. Nay, the corrections inflicted on Lot, David, and other offending believers, whose sins were eventually pardoned, display the same attributes, and authorize the same conclusions; so that the Psalmist might well say, "My flesh trembleth for fear because of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." On

Digitized by Google

the other hand, his patience, compassion, mercy, and grace, are exhibited in all his dealings with fallen man: "he endured with much long-suffering even the vessels of wrath:" he ever appeared ready to forgive the penitent, to pity the wretched, to relieve the distressed, to lift up the self-abased, and comfort the broken-hearted. "His mercy was upon those that feared him from generation to generation:" his dealings with Israel as a nation, and with individuals, proved this: nor did any sinner ever humbly seek his face in vain. The faithfulness of God is so illustrated in accomplishing his promise concerning the seed of the woman, &c. four thousand years after it was given, that other instances need not be adduced: his judgments coincided with his threatenings, except as repentance intervened; and a reserve of mercy was in that case implied in them all. The manifold wisdom of God is also most conspicuous in arranging these displays of justice and mercy, so as to secure the glory of all his attributes, and to leave no man any ground to presume, or to despair. And the whole of the discoveries given us of the future judgment, and the eternal state of happiness or misery, most perfectly coincides with the declarations relative to his harmonious perfections. But of this, and redemption by the incarnation of Emmanuel, and his atoning blood, we must forbear to speak further *in this place*. We may, however, observe, concerning this last (which is doubtless the greatest of all the discoveries that God hath given of himself), that it leads us to contemplate those mysteries of the Deity, which are so peculiar to revelation, that they who "lean to their own understandings" would represent them as contradictory and impossible. Yet it will be shown, that they are certainly revealed in Scripture; and thence it will follow, that they are appropriated to the true Object of all adoration, and distinguish him from every idol: so that they cannot be said to worship the God of the Bible, who reject the peculiar mysteries which it reveals, and adore not the One Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, into which Christians are baptised. And as all the Divine perfections are only seen in perfect harmony "in the face of Jesus Christ;" so they "whose eyes are blinded, that they should not see the light of this glory," (2 Cor. iv. 3—6), certainly worship the invention of their own minds, and not the God who hath revealed himself to man, in the person of Jesus Christ. Indeed this is manifest from the imperfection of the object of their worship, whom they imagine so clement, that he cannot hate and punish sin as it deserves; by the blasphemies which they often utter against God's justice and holiness, and the judgments which he hath executed and threatened. Let us then regard this as a matter of the greatest possible importance, and seek the knowledge of God from his word, and the teaching of his Spirit, as the fundamental concern in all our religious inquiries, that so we may be engaged, above all things, to fear, love, confide in, worship, and serve him; and to seek all our happiness in enjoying his favour, and glorifying his name.

ESSAY IV.

A Brief Exposition of the Ten Commandments, as comprising the substance of the Moral Law.

From the Scripture character of God, we proceed to the consideration of his moral government, as made known to us by revelation; and a clear knowledge of his holy law is peculiarly requisite in forming our judgment on this subject. This was delivered to Israel by Jehovah himself, from Mount Sinai, with most tremendous displays of his majesty, power, and justice; and though other Scriptures must be adduced as a divinely inspired comment, yet

Digitized by Google

the decalogue may properly be taken for our text, in examining the demands of the *moral* law. It is evident, that there is a distinction between *moral precepts* and *positive institutions*. Some things are in themselves so indifferent, that the same authority which commanded might have forbidden them; as the use of bread and wine in one ordinance, and that of water in another: but it is absurd to suppose, that God could have required his creatures to despise him, or to hate one another; or have forbidden them to speak truth and to do justice.

Some traces of the moral law are discoverable by our natural reason, and the whole accords to it; it has its foundation in the nature of God and man, in the relations men bear to him and to each other, and in the obligations that result from them: so that it is immutable in its nature, and demands obedience from all mankind, as far as they have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with it. Different circumstances may indeed occasion a coincident variation; as the entrance of sin hath rendered patience and forgiveness of injuries exercises of our love to God and our neighbours; but though these will cease in heaven, yet the grand principles whence they are deduced will continue the same to eternity.

The law is also *spiritual*; it takes cognisance of our inmost and most secret thoughts, desires, purposes, and dispositions, and demands the exact regulation of the judgment, will, and affections. Love is its principal requisition, without which the best external obedience is condemned as hypocrisy. This is peculiar to the law of God, who alone can search the heart; but, in common with other laws, it requires entire, uninterrupted, and perpetual obedience, for no law can tolerate the transgression of itself. From the entrance to the close of life, the Lord enjoins upon us exact conformity to every precept; every omission or commission, excess, defect, or deviation from this perfect rule is *sin*, and every sin deserves wrath, and needs forgiveness, (Rom. iii. 19—23).

As the ten commandments are divinely commented upon in all the preceptive parts of Scripture, so the substance of them is summed up in the two great commands of "loving God with all our hearts," and of "loving our neighbours as ourselves:" and we are authorised, by our Lord's example, to interpret every one of them in the strictest, most spiritual, and most extensive sense of which it is capable. Indeed, repentance, faith in Christ, and all other evangelical graces and duties, are exercises of supreme love to God, and required of a sinner, as placed under a dispensation of mercy, though originally the law had nothing to do with redemption, but lay at the foundation of another covenant. We may, therefore, drop the controversy concerning the rule of duty, whether it be the ten commandments, or the whole word of God; for the one, properly understood, will be found as "broad" as the other, seeing we cannot love God with all our hearts, unless we love every discovery he is pleased to make of his glory, believe every testimony, and embrace every promise which he gives, and seek his favour in the use of all the means he is pleased to appoint. Yet this relates only to the law, as the *rule of duty*, and as *given in subserviency to the gospel*; for originally it contains nothing about mercy, repentance, or acceptance of imperfect obedience; but only says, "do this and live," and "cursed be every transgressor."

Thus the law was given to Israel, not only to show them their real condition, according to the covenant of works, but also with reference to their national covenant, and as the rule of duty to redeemed sinners; and therefore mercy is mentioned in the second commandment; not, indeed, as communicated by the law, but as shown by the Lord to his obedient people. The remainder of this Essay will consist of a compendious exposition of the ten commandments, as introductory to a further consideration of the Divine government.

The great Lawgiver prefaced his injunctions, by proclaiming his essential glory and immutable excellency, "I am Jehovah." Being the source of

Digitized by Google

existence, and consequently of all power, wisdom, justice, truth and goodness, he is the standard of excellence and beauty, from whom all created amiableness is an emanation, of whose glory it is a feeble reflection. To him alone the throne belongs; he only is qualified to be the universal lawgiver and judge; and he has the sole and unalienable title to that love and service which his law demands. To this he added, "thy God," to express Israel's relation and obligations to him. We all are his rational creatures, and every benefit he bestows binds us more forcibly to love and obedience. We, like Israel, are his professed worshippers; and if we be what we profess, He is our portion and everlasting felicity; and this still enhances our obligations to devote ourselves to his service. The redemption of Israel from the house of bondage was typical of our redemption by Jesus Christ from sin and misery: and though all are bound to obey the law of God, yet none render any spiritual obedience to it, except his redeemed people. After this solemn introduction, Jehovah first added, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The commandments are addressed, in the singular number, to each person, because every one is concerned in them on his own account, and each prohibition implies a positive duty. This first requires a disposition and conduct suited to the relation in which we stand to "the Lord our God." He alone is the adequate object of our love, and able to satisfy our capacity of happiness; all we have and are belong to him, and he has an unalienable right to prescribe the use that we should make of all his gifts. He has so clear a title to our love, gratitude, reverence, adoration, submission, credence, confidence, and obedience, that we cannot withhold them, without the most manifest injustice. Considering "*who He is, and what He hath done for us,*" except we love him to the full extent of all our natural powers, we do not render him his due; and if we thus loved him, all contrary affections would be excluded, all inferior affections subordinated. Admiring his excellency, desiring and delighting in him and his favour, being grateful for his kindness, and zealous for his glory, with all the energy of our whole souls, it is evident that we should love other objects only for his sake, and according to his will; no creature could then rival Him in our affections, or prevail with us to neglect his service: and whilst we rendered Him the tribute of adoring love and praise, and so glorified Him, we should possess unalloyed felicity in the enjoyment of his favour. This is the reasonable state in which things ought to be; and all that deviate from it is sin, and the effect of man's apostacy.

In the preceding Essay, some thoughts have been offered on man's propensity to idolatry. To the disgrace of the human understanding, the grosser species of it have been very general in the world; and a more refined and plausible kind of idolatry hath often supplanted it, in those few places where something more rational hath prevailed. We need not, however, enlarge on this violation of the first commandment; or show particularly how the Pagans, and Israel, and some parts of the professing church of Christ, by worshipping creatures, have ascribed to *them* the glory of those attributes which Jehovah incommunicably possesses. This must be allowed to be the grand transgression of this law; and all pretences to witchcraft, fortune-telling, &c., partake in a measure of the same guilt; as information or assistance are professedly sought from creatures, where God should be wholly depended on, or submitted to. But this *spiritual* precept reaches much further. To love, desire, delight in, or expect good, from any forbidden indulgence, even in the smallest degree, must be a violation of it: and to suffer the most excellent or amiable of creatures to rival God in our affections, must be a proportionable contempt of him. Atheism and irreligion violate this law; for by them men set up themselves as gods, aspire to independence, reject subordination, and refuse to render homage or worship to any superior being; as if they had created themselves, and were sufficient for their own happiness! The proud man idolizes himself, and offers incense to his own deity; and therefore God resisteth him as his rival. The ambitious pay ho-

Digitized by Google

mage to the opinions of men, and seek happiness in their applause, or in such honourable distinctions as they can bestow; the revengeful usurp the throne of God, and invade *his* prerogative, to "whom vengeance belongeth." The covetous defiles his wealth; the sensualist his vile appetites, and the rapturous lover his mistress; he lives on her smiles, his heaven is placed in her favour, and her frown would make him the most wretched of all creatures. Nay, the doating husband, or fond parent, may deify the object of their affections; for though they ought to love them tenderly, yet it should be in subordination to the will and glory of God.

But no comment can equal the extent of this command: whatsoever consists not with the most perfect love, gratitude, reverence, submission, and devotedness of the whole heart to God, is a transgression of it: and it requires us to love the Lord, and all his creatures, according to their real worthiness; not more nor less, except as finite beings cannot love infinite excellency in an adequate manner. Obedience to it enthrones the Lord in our judgment and affections; and the whole of our love being thus given to Him, we should love all others for his sake, and according to the measure that he hath enjoined; whilst the violation of it destroys this regular subordination, and gives the creatures the throne in our hearts. Well, therefore, may it stand foremost in the decalogue, as our obedience in all other things depends on it: other transgressions injure the subject, and affront the sovereign; but the violation of this law is high treason against the Majesty of heaven; and it is equally destructive to the happiness of all who transgress it. The expression, "before me," implied, that idolatry could not be kept so secret, but it would be known to the Lord; it would at all times affront him to his face; but especially when committed by Israel, who had his glory continually displayed before their eyes.

II. The second commandment requires us to render him a worship and service, suited to his perfections, and honourable to his name. His incomprehensible nature cannot be represented by any similitude. The most exquisite painting or sculpture can only give an *external resemblance of a man*: even animal life, with its several functions, cannot be thus exhibited, much less can a likeness be made of the soul and its operations: how dishonourable then must be every attempt to represent the infinite God, by silver, or gold, graven by art and man's device! The general disposition of mankind, to form such similitudes of the Deity, proves that low apprehensions of him are congenial to our nature; and the practice hath exceedingly increased the confusion and grossness of men's conceptions concerning him. Only the more stupid of the heathens worshipped the picture or image itself; others used it as a visible representation of the invisible *Numen* or Deity: and all that ingenious papists have urged in behalf of their images, is equally applicable to Israel's worship of the golden calves, or that of the Ephesians paid to the image of Diana, which fell down from Jupiter: and as a material image of the Deity is also an affront to the person of Christ, the only adequate "image of the invisible God;" so the worship of saints and angels, as mediators and present deities, by images, in every respect robs him of his mediatorial glory. The commandment does not prohibit the making of all images and pictures for other purposes (as some have ignorantly supposed): for God commanded several to be made even in the construction of the tabernacle: but the *making* of them, in order to men's bowing down before and worshipping them; so that both the image maker, and the image worshipper, are, in this case, involved in the guilt. The prohibition includes every kind of creature, because all are utterly unfit to represent the infinite Creator: and there are some devices common among us, as emblematic of the Trinity, &c., which seem not to accord with the strictness of this injunction. But the spiritual import of the commandment reaches much farther: superstition and human inventions in religious worship, as if they could procure us acceptance with God, are evident violations of its spirit and intent. The use of things indifferent in religion, without any command from God, leads men's

Digitized by Google

minds to gross conceptions of him, as if he delighted in outward splendour, or external forms; and it commonly connects with a false dependence, substitutes somewhat in the place of God's appointments, and issues in usurped authority over men's consciences. But many *circumstances* of worship must be regulated by human discretion: and every man should judge for himself, which tend to these evils, and which do not, and be candid in judging such as differ from him. Hypocrisy and formality, arising from unworthy apprehensions of God, together with those delineations of his character that have been described, are certainly here prohibited: and, in short, this commandment requires us to conceive of God, in all respects, as far as we are able, according to the revelation he hath made of himself to us; to realize his glorious presence to our minds, *by faith, not by fancy;* to worship him as a Spirit, in spirit and truth, not with corporeal representations of him before our eyes, or low conceptions of him in our minds; but sincerely, inwardly, with the most fervent affections, and profound reverence of his infinite majesty; in *all* his appointed ordinances, and in them alone; and with frequency, as performing a service reasonable in itself, and most pleasant to our own souls, as well as honourable to his great name. The reason given for the prohibition of image worship, shows us, that the Lord is so tenacious of his honour in this matter, (especially in respect of his professed people), that the least approach to it will excite his hottest displeasure; even as the jealous husband is exasperated, and roused to seek vengeance, by whatever leads him to suspect his wife of adultery. If Israel, or any Israelites, revolted to idolatry, they would be deemed haters of God; as the wife would be supposed to hate her husband, when she preferred every worthless stranger to him: and the national covenant, with its peculiar blessings, being forfeited, the sins of the parents would involve their offspring in their punishment, to the third or fourth generation. The mention made of mercy, even to a thousand generations, &c. (that is, through successive ages to the end of time), relates to the law as given in subserviency to the gospel, which was administered to them by their legal expiations and purifications; and it shows how the Lord delights in pardoning the penitent and blessing the obedient. Thus the natural affection of men for their children should have engaged them to obedience; and by every tie they were kept close to the instituted worship of God, and at a distance from all idolatry.

III. The worshippers of the Lord must have frequent occasion to mention his name, and sometimes it will be requisite for them to call him to witness the truth of their words, or to bind themselves by vows or engagements as in his sight. The third commandment, therefore, prohibits us "to take the name of the Lord our God in vain;" that is, to use it needlessly, irreverently, profanely, or in fraud, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. It forbids all rash and unlawful vows; and such as relate to things uncertain or impracticable. Perjury of every kind is the capital transgression of it; for by this men appeal to the omniscient heart-searching God for the truth of what they testify or assert, or their sincerity in what they engage to do; when they do not know the truth of the one, and are consciously insincere in the other. This is one of the most attrocious and provoking crimes imaginable, though common among us to an inconceivable degree; being connected with other instances of disregard to this law, by the unnecessary multiplication of oaths in our judicial transactions, even on the most frivolous occasions; and by the extreme irreverence with which they are administered; for this should always be done, if possible, with all the solemnity of a religious ordinance or act of worship. All appeals to God in common conversation, with such expressions as "the Lord knows," &c.; when the matter attested is either not true, or not important: all profane cursing and swearing; all use of the words "God, Lord, Christ," &c., without necessity, seriousness, and reverence; whether in *improper* religious discourse, or as expletives in talking about other mattors: every expression that takes the form of an adjuration or imprecation, though the name of God be not used; yea, all that is more

Digitized by Google

than yea, yea, nay, nay, in common discourse: all jesting with God's word or sacred things; all irreverence to whatever relates to him; and the use of his tremendous name in religious worship, after a heedless or hypocritical manner; all these, I say, are violations of the spirit of this law. Moreover, it implies a command to remember habitually the infinite majesty, purity, and excellency of God; to behave towards him, in word and deed, with that awe and reverence of his perfections, which become such mean and worthless creatures, in his infinitely glorious presence. To this law it is added, that "God will not hold the transgressor guiltless." Men may not discover, or neglect to punish this crime; the sinner's conscience may scarce trouble him about it: but let him know, that God will most certainly detect and punish that atrocious affront which is thus put upon him; and often without the plea of temptation, except men can find pleasure in disobeying and defying their Creator!

IV. The form of the fourth commandment implies, that it had been previously known to Israel, though they were prone to forget it. The separation of a portion of our time, to the immediate service of God, is doubtless of moral obligation; for his glory and our good, personal and social, temporal and eternal, are intimately connected with it: but the exact proportion, as well as the particular day, may be considered as of positive institution; yet the proportion of one day in seven seems to have been fixed by Infinite Wisdom as most proper, in every age of the world; though the change of the dispensation, at the coming of Christ, and after his resurrection, has occasioned an alteration of the day, and an addition to the topics to be peculiarly commemorated and meditated on during the sacred rest. The sabbath among the Israelites was also ceremonial, and therefore it forms a part of that law; and being introduced into the judicial law, the violation of it was punishable by the magistrate; which seems also to be proper in all communities where Christianity is professed. Six days are allowed us for the diligent performance of our worldly business; but the seventh is consecrated to the immediate service of the Lord. Yet our souls must be attended to, and our God worshipped every day, that our business may be regulated in subserviency to his will. But on these days "we should do all our work," with the exception of works of charity, piety, and necessity alone; for "the sabbath was made for man." All works, therefore, of avarice, distrust, luxury, vanity, and self-indulgence, are entirely prohibited: our affairs should be previously so arranged, that as little as possible of a secular nature may interrupt the sacred duties of the Lord's day. Trading, paying wages, settling accounts, writing letters, or reading books on ordinary subjects, trifling visits, journies, excursions, dissipation, or converse, which only amuses, cannot consist with "keeping a day holy to the Lord:" and sloth is a carnal, not a spiritual rest. The sabbath should be a cessation from worldly labour, and rest in the service of God; serious self-examination, perusal of the Scripture, closet, family, and public worship, instruction of children and servants, meditation, and pious conversation, should occupy our time, from morning till evening; except as these duties are suspended by attention to such things as really conduce to our own good, or that of others. All this is obligatory on those who can do it: but servants and others may be under a *real necessity* of doing things which are not *necessary* in themselves, though liberty of this kind should be preferred to gain; and good management might often much lessen this evil. Were our love to God and spiritual things as intense as it ought to be, we should deem a day thus spent our great delight; for heaven will be an eternal rest, not essentially differing from it: all our aversion to such strictness arises from "the carnal mind, which is enmity against God:" and the advantages that would accrue from thus hallowing the sabbath, to the morals, health, liberty, and happiness of mankind, are so many and obvious, that they who doubt its obligation often allow its expediency. But men should not only forbear to set their children, servants, or slaves, about any needless work; but they must with authority require them too to keep holy

Digitized by Google

the Lord's day, which is greatly intended for their benefit: the cattle must also be allowed to rest from the hard labour of husbandry, journies, &c.; though doubtless we may employ them too, in works of necessity, piety, and charity: and thus they may properly be used for the gentle service of conveying those to places of public worship, who could not otherwise attend, or perform the duties to which they are called. Yet ostentation and self-indulgence multiply violations of the Lord's day in this respect. Even strangers, residing among us, should be persuaded to hallow, and restrained from profaning the sabbath. It was indeed originally instituted in honour of God our Creator; reasons are elsewhere adduced, which peculiarly respected the Jews, or referred to the cause of humanity: but redemption by Christ, as completed by his resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, to glorify him, are especially commemorated by Christians, whilst they hallow the first of the week, as the Lord's day. This very compendious exposition of the first table of the law suffices to prove its requirements to be very extensive, spiritual, reasonable, and beneficial; yet it must be owned to be entirely contrary to the disposition of our hearts, and diverse from the tenor of our lives; therefore we all need mercy, redemption, and a new creation to holiness, in order that we may please God and be made fit for heaven. We proceed to the second table.

V. This commandment of honouring parents must be considered as the abstract of all our relative duties: all other relations spring from that of parents and children, or partake in a measure of its nature; and this shadows out our relation to our great Creator. Parents are to be honoured, which implies that it is their duty to behave *honourably*, by performing the several parts of their parental charge, as entrusted with the care of their offspring, both in body and soul; and by a becoming deportment in all other respects. Yet the children are not absolved from their duty by the parent's sin, for which they must answer to God: and such a limitation, in this and other relative precepts, would absurdly constitute all the inferior relations to be judges and lords over their superiors. Children derive their being from their parents; and they are generally taken care of by them during their helpless infancy and inexperienced youth, with much care, labour, and expense. It is therefore reasonable that they should *so long* obey them unreservedly in all things lawful; and *afterwards* in all things that are not manifestly injurious to them, though they should be disagreeable. They ought to love their persons; respect their characters, counsels, and instructions; consult their interest, ease, credit, and comfort; conceal their infirmities, bear with their tempers and humours, alleviate their sorrows, and rejoice their hearts as far as possible: and when they are grown old and incapable of maintaining themselves, they ought even to labour for their support, if they be able, as their parents did for them when infants. In this both parents are equally included, and should be honoured and obeyed, and not in opposition to one another; which should teach them to set their children an example of impartiality, and to be harmonious in their conduct towards them. By parity of reason, they who have acted a parent's part, are entitled to a correspondent respect and deference: and all the superior and inferior relations have their several reciprocal duties, which may be referred to this command; but which will be distinctly considered in a separate Essay, on some future occasion. The annexed promise of long life, &c., to obedient children, might have a peculiar reference to the covenant of Israel; yet careful observers of mankind have noted its remarkable fulfilment in other nations; subordination in the family and community tends to personal and public felicity; and the dislike which the human heart bears to submission, renders it proper to enforce it by motives of every kind.

VI. This commandment requires us to "love our neighbour as ourselves," in respect of his person and life. Magistrates, as "God's ministers in executing vengeance," are, in some cases, commanded to put men to death; and in others it may be allowable, because conducive to the public good:

Digitized by Google

witnesses or executioners may concur in such capital punishments; we may doubtless take away another's life in defence of our own; *perhaps* in some cases in defence of our property. Some wars are necessary, and the blood shed in them is not imputed as murder to those that shed it; yet the guilt of it must rest somewhere: and few wars are so entered upon and conducted, as to leave any of the contending parties free from blood-guiltiness. A man may by misfortune kill another: yet God condemns as wilful murder many of those incidents which are called by our law man-slaughter. Furious passion, excited by sudden provocation, or drunkenness, is nowhere in Scripture excepted from the general rule, "He who sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The duellist is a revengeful murderer of the most atrocious kind: all fighting for wagers or renown violate this command, and the blood thus shed is murder. Whatever, by force or stratagem, deprives another of his life is prohibited: all the slaughter committed by oppressions, persecutions, attempts to reduce to, or confine in, slavery, our unoffending fellow-creatures, on any pretence whatsoever, is wilful, cruel murder. What then shall we think of the accursed slave trade, which will surely bring vengeance on this land if much longer tolerated! Even laws, needlessly sanguinary, (as I fear many are in this land,) involve the persons concerned in this enormous guilt: and they who should punish the murderer, and yet suffer him to escape, will be numbered among the abettors of his crime at God's tribunal. It moreover prohibits us to assault, maim, or wound others, or to assist those that do; to tempt men to crimes that destroy their constitutions, or to endanger their lives, either from the sword of justice, or the resentment of the injured party: nay, to entice men, by the prospect of a large reward, to such enterprises and labours as are known generally to shorten life. Many parents and wives are murdered by the gross misconduct of their children or husbands; numbers will be found guilty of this crime by covetously or maliciously wishing the death of others. The spiritual import of the commandment prohibits all envy, revenge, hatred, or causeless anger; all that insulting language which provokes to wrath and murder; and all the pride, ambition, or covetousness, which prompt to it. Nay, he will be condemned as the hater and murderer of his brother, who, seeing his life endangered by the want of food, raiment, medicine, &c., and having ability to relieve him, selfishly neglects to do it, (1 John iii. 15—17). But the murder of the soul is still more heinous. This is committed by seducing men to sin; by a bad example; disseminating poisonous principles: terrifying others from religion by persecution, or reviling or ridiculing such as attend to it; by withholding due instructions, warnings, and counsels, especially such as parents owe to their children, or ministers to their people: and it is tremendous to think what numbers will be thus condemned as the murderers of the souls of men. Nor is suicide to be overlooked, even in this compendium. We were not the authors, and are not the lords, of our own lives: nor may we leave our assigned post, or rush without a summons into the presence of our Judge, any more than we may execute vengeance on our neighbour, or send him to God's tribunal. Self-murder is a complication of ingratitude, contempt of the Lord's gift of life, defiance, impatience, pride, and rebellion: it is the most malignant of all murders, and can scarce ever be repented of; nor is it generally the effect of insanity, (as verdicts, in which perjury is committed from false tenderness, would lead us to suppose), except as all are insane, who are hurried on by fierce passions and Satan's temptations. That original murderer knows this present life to be the only season in which salvation can be obtained: and therefore he tempts men to such excesses as destroy the constitution, or as render life miserable; and he urges them on to suicide, that he may destroy body and soul at once, by *their* hands, not being permitted to do it by his own power. Extravagance, discontent, and despondency should therefore be avoided; and gratitude, patience, and hope cultivated, that he may be disappointed. In a word, this command requires enlarged benevo-

Digitized by Google

lence, kindness, long-suffering, and forgiveness; and a disposition to seek the welfare in all respects of every human being.

VII. This commandment regulates our love to our neighbours, in respect of their purity and domestic comfort; and requires the proper government of those inclinations which God hath implanted, in order to the increase of the human species. The marriage of one man with one woman was God's original institution (and so it is not merely a civil contract, as some pretend); these "became one flesh," inseparably united for helps meet to each other, to promote and share one another's satisfactions, and with united attention to educate their common offspring. The entrance of sin and death made way for the dissolution of this union: a variety of evils began to embitter the relation, and abuses were soon introduced: but though some things were formerly *connived* at, which accorded not with the original institution; yet Christ refers his disciples to *that*, as the standard of honourable marriage, as far as the change of circumstances can admit of it. The force acquired by men's passions, in consequence of sin, renders the "prevention of fornications" one express end of marriage: mutual forbearance and reciprocal compliances are now needful and incumbent; the sorrows of the female sex, as well as the afflictions of life, require peculiar sympathy to alleviate the anguish of the suffering party; whilst the separating stroke of death leaves the survivor free to take another companion. We must not then define adultery, as here prohibited, according to the *judicial* law of Moses, but by the decisions of Christ; with which polygamy and divorces (except for unfaithfulness) are utterly incompatible. It is evident, that marriage (being recognized in some appointed way, to distinguish it from illicit connections) gives each party such a property in the other's person and affections, that every violation of conjugal fidelity, on either side, is adultery, according to the New Testament; and far more deserves death (if we estimate crimes by the mischief they do) than many that are so punished. All other commerce between the sexes is prohibited by the spirit of this law; from the temporary connections, that are formed and dissolved at pleasure, to the lowest scenes of prostitution. The difference between the *tempters* and the *tempted*, and other circumstances, vary the degree of guilt contracted; the seducer's character is diabolical: but fornication is in almost every black catalogue in the Scripture; and, however men may be deceived by vain words, its dire effects on the human species prove the goodness as well as justice of God in this arrangement. Under the word *lasciviousness* various transgressions are denoted, which cannot be mentioned without offence; nay, every thing which does not comport with the design of marriage, though sanctioned by that name, violates the spiritual meaning of the prohibition. All polluted discourse, imaginations, or desires, are condemned by it; "he that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Writing, publishing, vending, circulating, reading, obscene books; exposing to view indecent pictures or statues; or whatever may excite men's passions, must partake of the same guilt: whilst wit, elegance, and ingenuity only increase the mischief, wherever the specious poison is administered: and all the arts of dress, motion, or demeanour, which tend to tempt heedless youth; with all those blandishments, insinuations, amorous looks, &c.; which subserve seduction, fall under the same censure. In short, the commandment requires the utmost purity, both of the body and soul, in secret as well as before men; with an holy indifference to animal indulgences, and strict government of all the appetites, senses, and passions: and it enjoins the desire and endeavour of preserving the same disposition and behaviour in all others also, as far as we have it in our power.

VIII. This commandment is the law of love in respect of property. The productions of the earth are obtained, and prepared for use, by labour; this gives property, and *that* justly descends to the owner's posterity or heirs. From this and similar causes, combining their effects for ages, the difference in men's circumstances originates. That portion which we can honestly

Digitized by Google

obtain, is "the bread which God hath given us," with which we should be satisfied. But men's passions crave more, and sloth refuses to labour: hence force and fraud are employed to get possession of the property of others, without their free consent. We need not enumerate those violations of which human laws take cognizance: but men may in various ways break the Divine law, and yet escape present punishment. Fraudulent bargains, which impose on the ignorant, credulous, or necessitous; abuse of confidence, extortion, exorbitant gain, deceitful combinations to enhance the price of goods, or lower the wages of the poor, will be condemned at God's tribunal, as violations of it. The overgrown ravager of nations and provinces, will be condemned as a principal thief and robber, without other distinction. Plundering the public, whether by oppressive rulers, and exorbitant exactions; or by smuggling, evading taxes, &c.; contracting debts to support vanity and luxury, in pursuit of some scheme of aggrandizement, or for any thing not absolutely necessary, without a fair prospect of paying them; taking advantage of *humane* laws, to evade payment, when the insolvent are again able to do it; all extravagance, beyond the sober allowance of man's income; and slothfulness, or *unnecessary* subsistence upon charity, are violations of this law, in different ways. Indeed it cannot consist with it to withhold from real objects of compassion proper relief; or to squeeze the poor so low in their wages, that they can scarce subsist, that men may live in affluence, and enrich their families. In short, it excludes covetousness, luxury, and the pride of life; and it requires industry, frugality, sobriety, submission to God's providence, and a disposition "to do to *all* others," in respect of worldly property, "as we would they should do unto us."

IX. This commandment is the law of love, as it respects our neighbour's reputation: though, in the connection of human affairs, the violation of it may affect his property and life; and bearing false witness, in a court of justice among us, may be perjury, robbery, and murder, as well as calumny. In such important concerns, we should testify nothing, of which we have not the fullest assurance; and every human passion should be watched over, that our evidence may not be warped by them. We should be exact *to a word* in reporting what we know, and in speaking the truth, and no more than the truth, and equal caution is required in juries, and in the judge who decides the cause. The malicious invention and circulation of slanderous reports, to the injury of a man's character, has a large proportion of the same atrocious guilt; to do this in sport is an imitation of the madman, who throws about arrows, firebrands, and death, for his diversion; to spread such as others have framed, when we suspect them to be false or aggravated; or even if we suppose or know them to be true, when there is no real occasion for it (such as the detection of a mischievous hypocrite or designing villain) is prohibited by this law: for the practice of retailing injurious reports results from pride, self-preference, malevolence, or conceited affectation of wit and humour. All severe censures, bitter sarcasms, ridicule, harsh judgements, ascribing good actions to bad motives, inuendos, misrepresentation, collecting and vending family anecdotes, &c., consist not with it. Much transgression of it is found in religious controversy (as well as in other books, as a lie or slander is far worse when printed than when only spoken); for *bigots* of all parties agree in mis-stating the actions, misquoting the books, and misreporting the words of their opponents. All lies class under the violation of this law; which are always an abuse of speech, and of our neighbour's confidence, and a derogation from the value of truth; and almost always injurious to mankind. Envy of others' praise runs counter to the spirit of the law; which requires sincerity, truth, fidelity, candour, and caution; with a disposition to honour what is honourable in all men, and to be as tender of their reputation as we could reasonably expect them to be of our's, and our feelings will instruct us how far this rule would carry us.

X. Lastly, we are commanded, not to covet any thing that is our neighbour's. This restriction is placed as the fence of all the rest; and the

Digitized by Google

apostle's reference to it, (Rom. vii. 7, 8) shows, that it comprises the utmost spirituality of the law; and it is a perpetual confutation of all those systems by which the outward gross crime is considered as the only violation of the command. We must not so much as desire any thing whatsoever which God forbids, or which his providence withholds: and so far from leveling property, or seizing violently on our neighbour's possessions, we must not so much as hanker after them. The most secret wish for another man's wife violates this precept: but to desire an union with an unmarried woman only becomes sinful when it is excessive, and when the will of God is not submitted to, if he render it impracticable. We may desire that part of a man's property which he is inclined to dispose of, if we only think of equitable terms: but what he chooses to keep we may not covet. The poor man may desire moderate relief from the rich: but he must not hanker after his affluence, or repine, even if he do not relieve him. Men exposed to equal hazards, may agree to a proportionable contribution to him that suffers loss; for it accords with the law of love to help the distressed; and this exculpates insurance when fairly conducted; but all gaming, public or private*, is coveting our neighbour's good to increase our wealth by his loss, and is therefore a direct violation of the command. In fine, discontent, distrust, love of wealth, pleasure, and grandeur, desire of change, the habit of wishing, and every inordinate affection, are the evils here prohibited; and we know them to be the sources of all other crimes, and of man's misery; and the command requires moderation in respect of all worldly things, submission to God, acquiescence in his will, love to his commands, and a reliance on him for the *daily* supply of all our wants, as he sees good. We cannot close this explication of the law, (in which we find nothing redundant, defective, or injurious, but all things holy, just, and good) more properly, than by the words of our church service, "Lord have mercy upon us," (forgiving all our past transgressions), "and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee."

ESSAY V.

On Man's Situation as a Sinner in this present world.

THE apostle defines "sin to be the transgression of the law," (1 John iii. 4); and whatever in any respect or degree deviates from this perfect rule is sin, and exposes a man to condemnation. "By the law," therefore, "is the knowledge of sin," (Rom. iii. 20): the better we understand the holy, just, and good commandments of God, the more enlarged will be our acquaintance with the vast variety of sins that are continually committed, as well as with the evil and desert of every transgression; and a comprehensive knowledge of our whole duty is essential to a just estimate of our own character, or our situation in respect to the eternal world.

But we should not only attend to the requirements and prohibitions of the divine law; its sanctions also demand our most serious consideration. Indeed, the law, strictly speaking (as distinguished from the gospel), is merely a rule and a sanction: a rule formed by infinite wisdom, holiness, and goodness, and enforced by supreme authority; a sanction to be awarded by immutable justice and almighty power, according to the declarations of eter-

* Not excepting lotteries, or even *tontines*, these latter constitute a kind of complicated wager about longevity, to be decided by Providence in favour of the survivors; and must, therefore, be equally culpable with other games of chance. Coveting other men's property, contrary to the law of love, and enriching the survivors, commonly at the expense of the relatives of the deceased, are intimately connected with them; whilst they lead men into strong temptations secretly to wish for the death of others, for the sake of advantages, which they inordinately desire, and irregularly pursue.

Digitized by Google

nal truth. Repentance and amendment are right, and accord to the spirit of the commandment; but they make no compensation for transgression, and are not noticed by the law: and the mercy exercised by the lawgiver has reference to the provisions of another covenant. Perfect obedience is the uniform demand of the precept; condemnation inevitably follows transgression. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," (James ii. 8—11); even as a man is condemned for violating one of the many statutes of the realm, in a single instance, though no other offence be charged upon him. The apostle, therefore, declares, that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written cursed is every one that continueth not," (during his whole life) "in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," (Deut. xxvi. 15—16; Gal. iii. 10): and the moral law must be included at least in this general language. They alone who have at all times perfectly kept the whole law, are entitled to the reward according to it; for "the man that doeth them shall live in them, but the soul that sinneth shall die;" and "as all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," (of rendering to him the glory which is due to his name); so *in this respect* "there is no difference," but "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world shall become guilty before God," (Rom. iii. 9—23); though an immense difference subsists between some men and others, in respect of the nature, number, and aggravations of their offences. All attempts, therefore, in a sinner to justify himself, must result from ignorance of God and his law, and of himself; or from a disposition to impeach the strictness of the law, and the justice of the lawgiver. Our Lord explains the import of the curse of the law (from which he redeemed his people, by becoming a curse for them), when he forewarns us, that he will say to the wicked at the day of judgment, "Depart from me, ye *cursed*, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;—and these shall go away into everlasting punishment." (Matt. xxv. 41—46). We are constituted of body and soul; the soul purposes the act of disobedience, and the body executes its purpose: so that it is *reasonable* to suppose, that the soul will at least share the punishment which the law denounces against the offender. When, therefore, the apostle reminded his brethren of their obligations to the Lord Jesus, he says, "who delivered us from the wrath to come," (1 Thess. i. 10): whence it is evident, that he considered himself, and all the Christians in the world, to have been previously exposed, not only to present effects of the Divine displeasure (from which Jesus does not deliver his people), but also to future condemnation. The original transgression (through which by "one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin") was indeed a violation of a positive injunction; but love to God, himself and his posterity, absolutely required Adam to obey it, and therefore by disobedience, he fell under the curse of the law: and the event sufficiently proves, that all his posterity were interested in that transaction, and fell with him; for it is an undeniable fact, that men are universally prone to break the law of God, and universally liable to pain, suffering, and death. All that believe the Bible will rest satisfied with the Scripture account of this mysterious subject: others will never be able to account for the state of the world on any principles that are more rational: and the proper answer to those who object to an evident fact, as inconsistent with divine justice, wisdom, and goodness, has been already given by the apostle, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

But our situation as sinners in this present world, will not here be considered so much the effect of Adam's sin, as of our personal transgressions; for whatever we might argue concerning those "who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," by willingly and knowingly preferring their own inclinations to God's express commandment, such as are capable of reading this Essay, will hardly pretend that they never once sinned in this manner. It is evident, that "it is appointed to all men once to die;" the sentence "dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return," overtakes

Digitized by Google

every one; no vigour, power, wisdom, learning, wealth, efforts, or virtue, can rescue any man from this common lot of our fallen race: only two exceptions have hitherto been made to the general rule, no more are to be expected till the coming of Christ; and few have ever been so absurd as to think of eluding or overcoming this universal conqueror. But "after death is the judgment;" and though few are willing to believe the solemn truth, yet it would have been found equally impossible for any sinner to escape condemnation at the decisive season, had not mercy brought in another hope by Jesus Christ.

If we judge of dispositions and actions by the holy law of God, we shall not long be able even to doubt, but that men are born in sin, and by nature propense to evil and averse to good: "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and the carnal mind, which is natural to us, is "enmity against God," (Rom. viii. 5—9). It is the universal law of the whole creation, that every plant or animal, possesses the properties of that from which it was derived. When Adam became a sinner, he begat sons "in his own likeness;" that which the Creator had pronounced very good soon became very bad; "the imagination of men's hearts were only evil continually;" "the earth was filled with violence" and wickedness, and so it evidently continues to this day. If men argue, that all this results from education, habit, and example, we might inquire how it came to pass, that bad education, example, and habits became so general, if the nature of man be not bad also? But the impossibility, in the ordinary course of things, of "bringing a clean thing out of an unclean," shows us how the world comes to be so full of all vice and wickedness.

But (however this may be determined) it must be allowed, that men in general in all parts of the earth, are very different in their dispositions and conduct, to what the law of God requires them to be. It is also most certain, that they are liable to a vast variety of miseries and pains; that anxiety, vexation, disappointment, and dissatisfaction, are inseparable from every earthly condition, pursuit, possession, and connection; that life itself is short and uncertain; that the approach and stroke of death must be connected with grievous sufferings, if not with terror and dismay: that every earthly pursuit and enjoyment must shortly be thus terminated; and that the body (however active, vigorous, comely, pampered, or decorated it may now be) must then be consigned to the dark and noisome tomb, there to moulder to its original dust. All this would be very gloomy and dreary, even if it could be certainly known that nothing farther was to be apprehended; but a future state of righteous retribution must exceedingly enhance the horror of the prospect, to such persons as are condemned at the bar of their own consciences. The expectation of a future state seems congenial to the human mind; and the arguments of various kinds, which have been urged in proof of the immortality of the soul, and other doctrines connected with it, are so cogent, as to evince such expectations to be the result of serious reflection, and not the offspring of credulity, superstition, or imposture; nay, facts manifestly show, that no ingenuity or efforts can wholly erase the idea, even from the minds of such persons as are most deeply interested, and most earnestly desirous, to find it a mere groundless imagination.

But as this expectation of a future state is too vague and confused to answer the practical purposes of that doctrine, so the ignorance of men in general concerning the character, commands, and government of God, united to the self-flattery that is natural to us all, preserves them from that terror which the thoughts of a future judgment would otherwise inspire, if considered apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ; so that the more men know of God and of themselves, the greater horror will be associated with the prospect of death and judgment, except it be overcome by "peace and joy in believing," (Rom. xv. 13).

The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, a future judgement, and a state of righteous retributions, are doctrines most evidently

Digitized by Google

confirmed to us by "the sure testimony of God:" and so clear and explicit are the Scriptures on these topics, that scarce any thing but the consciousness of such conduct, as weakens the hope of eternal felicity, connected with reluctance to admit the dread of eternal misery, seems sufficient to induce men to deny or argue against the real eternity of that state, which commences at death, and shall be confirmed and completed at the day of judgement; whilst the absurdity of reasoning against the justice or goodness of those things which God hath done, or declared he will do, seems the summit of man's pride, presumption, and folly. The Greeks were a speculating people, and could not but have the idea of *duration without end* (and this is all the idea of eternity to which we can attain): the strongest words in that copious language are employed by the sacred writers on this subject; and I apprehend that the expression translated *for ever and ever*, always means *eternal* in the strictest sense of that word: however, he that should make the trial would scarce find more energetic phrases in the whole compass of the Greek language, as authorised by the example of ancient writers, to express the idea of eternal misery, than are to be found in the New Testament. The same words are used on this awful subject, by which the *eternity* of heavenly felicity, and the *eternal* existence of God are expressed, and in the same manner. The repeated declarations concerning the wicked, that "*their* worm never dieth" (which must denote eternal consciousness and self-reflection); that "their fire shall never be quenched," with the words "eternal punishment," "the blackness of darkness for ever," most obviously imply this alarming doctrine. It may hereafter be shown, that sinful creatures must continue guilty and polluted, yea, must increase in evil propensities, and multiply crimes to all eternity (whatever they suffer), unless they are changed by an exertion of almighty power, and pardoned by an act of free mercy: not the most remote hint is given through the whole Scriptures, that mercy or grace will be vouchsafed to any who die in their sins, or that God will ever annihilate his rebellious creatures, but every thing warrants the opposite conclusion. It evidently answers the purpose of the enemies of our souls, and forwards their work of temptation and destruction, to persuade men that they will not be finally miserable, though they continue impenitent and indulge their lusts till death: and the folly and madness of those who profess to believe the Bible to be the word of God, yet sin on, in hopes of finding all the denunciations false or unmeaning, which it contains to this effect, and who bolster up their own and other men's confidence with vain reasonings and sophistical arguments, is great beyond expression.

As our sentiments will not alter the purposes of God, so it is as irrational as uncandid to charge those with want of sensibility, compassion, or philanthropy, who explain such Scriptures in their most obvious meaning; and who warn and persuade men, by "the terror of the Lord," to repent and seek the salvation of Christ. If several persons were fast asleep in a house that was on fire, we should best express our compassion for them by alarming them speedily, and even violently, and so forwarding their escape, not by leaving them to sleep on, lest they should be too much terrified. They who really believe that all impenitent and unbelieving sinners will be for ever miserable, suppose such men to be in a condition infinitely more tremendous than the persons alluded to, and they cannot but endeavour to convince them of their danger, ere it be for ever too late; the more they love them, the greater will be their earnestness in warning them to "flee from the wrath to come;" and they often show their philanthropy, by spending their time in incessant labours, and by distributing their property in relieving the miseries of mankind, and sometimes by laying down their lives for their good.

We may also observe, that the Scripture uniformly speaks of *two ways, two descriptions of men*, and *two places*, to which they are removed at death; and never intimates a middle path, state, or character (though there be degrees both of happiness and misery): nor does it mention any alteration in the

Digitized by Google

condition, either of the righteous or the wicked, except as the resurrection will re-unite their bodies to their souls, and display to the whole world the justice and mercy of God in his dealing with them. All purgatories, therefore, whether before or after the day of judgment, are wholly unscriptural; all reasonings on this subject are vain and presumptuous attempts to remove "the great gulph which God hath fixed," calculated to take men off from preparing seriously for that day, when "the wicked shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into eternal life."

It appears, therefore, that every man lies under a two-fold condemnation for his sins: he is sentenced to various temporal sufferings, to be terminated by death, and to eternal misery in another world: and if any one should object to this, on the supposition that his sins do not merit so tremendous a punishment, I would inquire, whether human legislators and judges ever think the criminals themselves competent to decide on the equity of their statutes and decisions? And whether we are capable of determining the degree of evil contained in rebellion against the authority of the infinite Creator, and what punishment the glory of his name, and the everlasting advantage of the whole creation, may require him to inflict upon transgressors? In respect of the former part of this sentence, alleviations and respites alone can be expected; but we may hope for the entire abolition of the latter, as we live under a dispensation of mercy, through the great Mediator of the new covenant. Of this salvation we may hereafter enlarge; at present it suffices to say with the Psalmist, "If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

The inevitable certainty of death, the uncertainty of the time and manner in which each person shall die, with the manifold troubles and sorrows of life, the turbulency of the passions, the remorse and terrors, and the anguish of the closing scene of wicked men, are no feeble emblems of the confinement, chains, and tortures of a condemned criminal, terminating only in his execution: the miseries which they occasion to each other, aptly represent those scenes which meet the observation of such persons as are conversant with prisons; in which wretched men have little relief from the anguish of their own minds, except in reproaching and plaguing their companions in guilt: and the dissipated, sensual, and noisy pleasure, by which at other times they stun reflection, and excite transient turbulent joy, resembles the drunken carousals of the criminals, their singing and dancing in their chains, and the infatuated levity of some of them, even to the very moment of execution. But the believer has another prospect opened to his view; he is indeed a criminal, but he is pardoned and reconciled to his prince; a few days he must abide in his prison previous to his regular discharge, but when the other criminals shall be led to execution, he will not only be set at liberty, but admitted to the presence and full favour of his gracious Benefactor, ennobled with the greatest dignities, and enriched beyond expression: in the mean time, the hopes and earnests of such felicity support and solace his mind, and he knows, amidst his pains and sorrows, that "blessed is he whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

The uncertain continuance of this vain life is the space allotted us by the long-suffering of our offended God, to seek the reversal of that sentence which relates to our final condemnation. To direct our course in this important pursuit, "to us are committed the oracles of God," "which are able to make us wise unto salvation by faith in Jesus Christ." Information, counsels, invitations, warnings, and promises, suited to our case, are there given us; means of grace are appointed, in which we may apply for every needful blessing; and especially the Holy Spirit is promised to all who humbly seek and depend on his gracious teaching, sanctifying and comforting influences, and seek these blessings by earnest prayer; so that no man (whatever his sins, habits, temptations, or situation may be) can come short of this salvation, provided he seek for it in the appointed way, and with a

Digitized by Google

diligence suited to its inestimable value. This is the situation of every man so long as life continues. for that *judicial* blindness and obduracy, to which many are given up, consists in a total and final neglect, contempt, or abuse of this salvation. But when death removes a man out of this world, his opportunity is over, and his state fixed to all eternity.

We are then criminals, reprieved for a short and uncertain time, by the mercy of our prince, that we may have an opportunity of casting ourselves on his clemency, and seeking a pardon, in a way which for his own glory he hath prescribed. If we avail ourselves of this advantage, the more terrible part of our punishment will be remitted, and the remainder will be counterbalanced by most animating hopes and consolations, sanctified to our greatest good, and soon terminate in everlasting felicity; but if we neglect so great salvation, our vain and vexatious worldly pursuits and pleasures will soon issue in final and eternal misery.

Our first great business and interest, therefore, during our present uncertain state, must be to prepare for death and judgment, by seeking "eternal life, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord:" for if we succeed in this grand concern, all inferior disappointments or losses will shortly be most amply made up to us; but if we fail in this respect, our present successes will only serve to aggravate our future anguish. Every pursuit, which is incompatible with this primary interest, must be madness and ruin, however fashionable, reputable, lucrative, or agreeable it may otherwise be. Not only inferior elegances, distinctions, and honours, but even crowns and sceptres, the splendour of courts, the councils of statesmen and senators, the grand concerns of empires, yea "all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them," dwindle into utter insignificancy, and fade as a withering flower, when compared with eternal happiness or misery: "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The soul of man, bearing the natural image of God in its noble powers and faculties, capable of being renewed to his moral image, "in righteousness and true holiness," being endued with the capacity of most exquisite pleasure, or most inconceivable anguish, and formed to subsist in happiness or misery, through the countless ages of eternity, is lost, when the favour and image of God are finally forfeited, and when it is condemned to endure his tremendous wrath, and to be given up to the unrestrained fury of all vile affections, in the company of fallen spirits for evermore. This loss is incurred by sin; but the forfeiture is ratified by the sinner's persevering impenitence, unbelief, and disobedience: the pleasure, profit, honour, power, or ease which men seek by continuing in sin, is the price of their souls: they are so infatuated, as thus to sell them for the most worthless trifles; because (like our first parents) they credit Satan's lies more than the truth of God, through desire of the forbidden fruit; or because they put off the grand concern to a future season, and quiet their consciences (as debtors do their importunate creditors), by fixing on some future time of intended amendment; or because they think their state good, when God's word declares the contrary. Thus their opportunity elapses, and too late they understand the energy of the question, "what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

This shows us the importance of our Lord's exhortation, "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Admission into that kingdom which God hath set up among men, by the gospel of his Son, the privileges of which consist in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; the holiness and blessings of that kingdom for ourselves, and the peace, prosperity and enlargement of it in the world, should be sought by diligence in all appointed means, as our grand objects, with the first and best of our time and affections, in preference to all other things, and with a willingness to part with, or venture whatever comes in competition with them, even if that should be our estates, liberty, friends, or life itself. Nor are we even allowed "to fear them who can only kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do," when this would lead us to incur his displeasure, "who is able to de-

Digitized by Google

stroy both body and soul in hell." A proper attention to our worldly business and interests would come in as a part of our duty to God, to his church, to the community, and to our families; every thing lawful and expedient would thus be rendered subservient to our grand object, and all things needful would be added to us; but men are ruined by reversing God's order, and seeking first the world, and the things that are in the world, even "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Even where gross vices and open ungodliness are avoided, how greatly are persons of all ranks, endowments, and professions, "careful and troubled about many things," instead of attending simply and diligently to the one thing needful, and decidedly "choosing that good part which would never be taken from them." Men's thoughts, contrivances, hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, maxims, wisdom, assiduity, and conversation, are almost wholly engrossed by the perishing, vexatious trifles of time. Every vague, strange, and uninteresting report is more attended to than "the glad tidings of salvation;" every science deemed better worth cultivating than the knowledge of God; every question is thought to be sufficiently important to set the ingenuity of men at work to give it a satisfactory answer, except it be inquired, "what must we do to be saved?" and such topics only excite astonishment, disgust, a short silence, and the starting of some more congenial subject. If a man pretend to teach others the way to health, to riches, to the enjoyment of life, or how to appear to advantage among their companions, assiduous attention and liberal compensation will not be withheld; but they who would teach men the way of eternal life, must not expect much regard, even if they desire no other recompense.

But time and room would fail, should we attempt to enumerate the proofs of man's folly and madness in this respect. Even the very messages of God, respecting judgment, eternity, and his great salvation, instead of meeting with a serious regard, are often set to music, and profanely employed to vary the species of pleasurable dissipation! Nay, they are often preached out of ostentation, avarice, envy, or strife; heard as a matter of curiosity or amusement; or contended for in pride, virulence, and furious anger! The grand business of most men seems to be, to avoid the burthen of reflection, to cause time to glide away as imperceptibly as possible, and so *apparently* to shorten the span allotted them to prepare for eternity. Well might the Psalmist then say, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." But, O ye giddy sons and daughters of Adam, what will ye think of your present pursuits, when death shall summon you to God's tribunal? What will then your riches, pleasures, decorations, elegances, honours, or dignities avail you? What comfort will the knowledge of all languages and sciences then afford? What will you think of your present anxious cares, covetings, envying, repinings, and disputes, when the night cometh in which no man can work? Seek, then, the "Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

ESSAY VI.

On the Deity of Christ.

THE doctrine of a Mediator, through whom a just and holy God deals mercifully with believers, is the grand peculiarity of revelation; and it must therefore be of the greatest importance for us to form a proper estimate of the personal dignity of this Mediator. The doctrine which I shall here at-

Digitized by Google

tempt to establish from Scripture, may be thus stated: "That Jesus Christ is truly and really God, one with, and equal to the Father; being from eternity possessed of all divine perfections, and justly entitled to all divine honours; yet personally distinct from the Father, and so called his own Son, his only-begotten Son, &c.: but that, in order to the performance of his mediatory office, he assumed our nature into personal union with the Deity; became one with us, truly man, like us in all things, sin alone excepted; and that he is thus God and man in one mysterious, incomprehensible Person; so that 'all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily.'"

It is obvious, that no argument can be brought against the doctrine of our Lord's essential Deity, as here stated, from those Scriptures which speak of his human nature, his mediatorial office, or his inferiority to the Father in both these respects; for our doctrine implies this, and even essentially requires it; as an ambassador, though subordinate by office to his prince, is not supposed to be of an inferior nature, or of inferior abilities to him. We need not therefore discourse on this part of the subject: it is generally allowed by all, but deists and atheists, that "Christ is come in the flesh;" though numbers contend that he could not have come in any other way (which renders the language of inspiration unmeaning, if not absurd); and others deem him a mere creature of some supra-angelic nature, and only called God in consequence of his mediatorial exaltation. But the idea of a creature, however exalted, being advanced to divinity, is so repugnant to all rational principles, as well as to the declarations of Jehovah, that "he knows no god besides himself, and will not give his glory to another," that it will not be necessary to discuss the subject with any particular respect to these distinct opinions; but merely to show, that our Redeemer is by nature "God over all, blessed for evermore." At present I shall adduce a few select arguments in direct proof of this point, leaving some other things that belong to the subject to be discussed in the next Essay.

I. The reader will naturally turn his thoughts to those Scriptures in which Jesus Christ is expressly called GOD, and LORD. "Without controversy," says the apostle, "great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16). He not only allows his doctrine to be very mysterious, but even appears to glory in it as "the great mystery of godliness;" nor could it be controverted or denied, that it was a great mystery. We may therefore be sure, that they, who would so interpret his words as to render his doctrine scarce mysterious at all, do not understand them: but they, who suppose him to mean, that Jesus was Emmanuel, *God with us;* that the child born at Bethlehem was *the mighty God*, as the prophet foretold, consider his proposition both as a great mystery, and as the source, centre, and support of godliness (Isa. vii. 14. ix. 6). It would be superfluous, in this brief attempt, to do more than refer the reader to the well-known passages to this effect (John i. 1—18; Phil. ii. 5—8; Col. i. 15—17; Heb. i.) and to entreat him to read them with attention, as the word of God, and with earnest prayer to be enabled to understand and believe them; for it seems impossible for human language to express any sentiment more strongly than they do the Deity of Christ. He, "who was in the beginning with God, and was God;" "who made all things," so that "without him was not any thing made that was made;" "*by whom* and *for whom* all things were created, and *by whom* all things consist," and who "upholds all things by the word of his power," must be "God over all, blessed for evermore;" for "he that made all things is God," which surely none but an avowed atheist will deny.

These, and several other passages of this kind, will come again under consideration towards the close of this Essay: and this first argument may be concluded, by desiring the reader to consider what the apostle meant by saying, "The second man is the Lord from heaven," if Christ be only a mere man, or a created being? (1 Cor. xv. 47.)

II. Several texts of the Old Testament concerning Jehovah are applied in

Digitized by Google

the New to Christ. The prophet declares, "that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered:" this the apostle applies to Christ, (Joel ii. 32; Rom. x. 13); for he adds, "how shall they call on him of whom they have not heard? or how shall they hear without a preacher?" &c. Now it is manifest, that Joel predicted the judgments which awaited the Jews for rejecting the Messiah, (Acts ii. 16—21): but they certainly did call upon Jehovah as the God of their fathers, to deliver them, and yet they were not delivered, because they would not join with those who called on the name of Jesus; and they only who called on *him* were delivered. As therefore the Scripture cannot be broken, Christ is Jehovah: Paul considered him as such, and the event demonstrated him to be so. The Psalmist says, "*Taste* and see that Jehovah is good:" to this the apostle manifestly refers, when he uses these words, "If so be ye have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious—to whom coming, as to a *living stone*," &c.; and in what follows, the attentive reader will perceive that he applies to Christ what the prophet had spoken of Jehovah God of Hosts himself, (Psalm xxxiv. 8; Isaiah viii. 13—15; xxviii. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 3—8). Isaiah had a most extraordinary vision of Jehovah in his temple; and the evangelist declares, that he then "saw the glory of Christ, and spake of him," (Isaiah vi; John xii. 39—42); and Paul applies to Christ's coming to judgment what the same prophet had written of Jehovah swearing by himself, "that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess to God," (Isaiah xlv. 21—25; Rom. xiv. 9—12. Indeed the whole passage referred to, especially the last verse, "In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory," proves that Emmanuel was especially meant, in whom alone believers are justified, and glory (1 Cor. i. 30, 31). Instances of this kind might be easily multiplied; but I would rest the argument principally on those which follow. Jehovah, speaking to Moses, declared his self-existent, immutable, and eternal Deity, by saying, I AM THAT I AM; and ordered him to inform Israel, "that I AM had sent him to them." This Christ expressly applied to himself when he said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Had he said, before Abraham was, *I was*, it would sufficiently have proved his pre-existence to all, who believe him to be truth, or to speak truth; but we cannot affix any meaning to the words, as they now stand, unless we allow him to be the eternal God. This his enemies of old clearly perceived, and therefore they went about to stone him for blasphemy: nor can they, who deem him only a man, fairly dissent from their verdict, however it may be convenient to them to palliate the language in question. Should we render the words "I AM HE," they are then equivalent to those of Jehovah, "Before the day *was*, I *am* he (Isaiah xliii. 13); and the use of the present tense, with reference to Abraham, who lived so many ages before, perfectly discriminates this passage from all others, in which the same expression is used, either by our Lord or any other person (Exod. iii. 14; John viii. 58). Indeed, the language of the passage in Exodus, and that of Luke concerning it (Acts vii. 30—37), lead us to consider the eternal Son, the great Angel of the covenant, as the speaker on this occasion: and whoever attentively compares the appearances of Jehovah to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and many others, with the words of the evangelist, "No man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son—hath declared him," will be apt to conclude, that all these were discoveries of that very Person, in the form of God, who afterwards appeared in the form of a servant. Again, Isaiah introduces Jehovah saying, "I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." This Christ, appearing in vision to John, expressly and repeatedly claimed to himself (Isaiah xliv. 6; Rev. i. 8, 11, 19, 18; ii. 8; xxii. 13). Now, can any reasonable man suppose, that Jesus, had he been no more than a mere creature, would have used such language of himself, and appropriated the very words by which Jehovah declared his own eternal power and godhead? (Isaiah xli. 4; xliii. 10—12; xlviii. 11, 12.) Finally, Jehovah claims it as his prerogative "to search the hearts, and try the reins:" and Christ most em-

Digitized by Google

phatically says, "And all the churches shall know that I *am he*, which searcheth the reins and hearts," &c. (Jer. xvii. 10; Rev. ii. 23.) Did any holy being ever use such language? Or would the holy Jesus, if he had not been one with and equal to the Eternal Father?

III. We may next consider some things which Christ spoke of himself, or his disciples concerning him, as manifest proofs of his deity. "Destroy," says he, "this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again: but he spake of the temple of his body" (John ii. 19—21). Not to insist on the appropriate sense, in which he called his body a temple, as the immediate residence of his Deity, I would inquire whether it be not an act of divine power to raise the dead? Whether any mere man ever raised his own body, after he had been violently put to death? and whether God did not actually raise again the man Christ Jesus? The obvious answer to these questions will evince, that Christ had a nature distinct from his manhood, that he was truly God, as one with the Father; that he had power to lay down his life, and *power to take it again*; and that by so doing he proved himself to be the Son of God, in that sense, which the Jews deemed blasphemy: for that was the crime alleged against him, and which they supposed to be blasphemy by their law (John xix. 7). Again, "I will," saith Christ to his disciples, "give you a mouth and wisdom; which none of your enemies shall be able to gainsay:" now who can give a mouth and wisdom, but God only? (Exod. iv. 11; Prov. ii. 6; Luke xxi. 15). Did any mere man, or holy creature ever advance such a claim, or induce others to form such expectations from them? Yet, according to this promise, the evangelist says, "Then opened he their understandings to understand the Scriptures" (Luke xxiv. 45). To Nicodemus, who was astonished at his discourse on regeneration, he said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that came down from heaven; even the Son of Man, *who is* in heaven" (John iii. 12, 13). Now in what sense could the Son of man be said "to come down from heaven, and at the same time to be in heaven" (even when he was speaking on earth), if there were not such an intimate union between the man Christ Jesus, and the Word, that "in the beginning was with God, and was God," that what belonged to the one nature might properly be said of the other? Thus "God purchased the church with *his own* blood;" because he, who shed his blood, was God as well as man: and thus the Son of Man was in heaven, because that Person, whose omnipresence filled the heavens, was also the Son of Man: and this was doubtless a specimen of those heavenly things, which are far more mysterious than regeneration. Similar to this are those declarations of our Lord, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there *am I* in the midst of you; and, lo, *I am* with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20): which certainly are equivalent to the promises of Jehovah in the Old Testament, that he would be with his people in all their trials, &c.; and can by no ingenuity be separated from the attribute of omnipresence: for Christ, as man, is in heaven, and is not personally present with his ministers and congregations. "No one," says he, "knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; neither knoweth any one who the Father is save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22). Is not this an assertion, that the Son is equally incomprehensible with the Father; and a declaration, that all knowledge of God is erroneous, which is not learned by faith in him? When he was questioned (probably before the Sanhedrim) for healing on the sabbath day (John v), he answered, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" and the Jews considered this as a declaration, that "God was his *own* Father," and as "making himself equal with God." His subsequent discourse, in which he stated his union of counsel and operation with the Father, and often referred to his human nature, and mediatorial undertaking, has been frequently misunderstood: but surely he who spoke of "quickening whom he would," of "having life in himself," and

Digitized by Google

of "being honoured by all men, even as they honoured the Father that sent him," cannot be thought to have objected to the inference which had been drawn from his first assertion. In like manner, when he had said "I and my Father are one," one Being or Deity (θεος, numen), and the Jews charged him with blasphemy, "because, being a man, he made himself God," his answer, which concludes thus, "that ye may know and believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me," could not be intended as a denial of their allegation; though we should allow, that he waved the farther discussion of the subject, by referring to the language of Scripture, concerning magistrates as types of the Messiah, at least the Jews did not so understand him; for they renewed their attempts to seize and stone him as a blasphemer, (John x. 27—39). It would not consist with the brevity required in this Essay to consider particularly our Lord's words to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life," &c.: his reply to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father—I am in the Father, and the Father in me;" with other expressions of his last discourse with his disciples, &c. "they have both seen and hated both me and my Father,"—"All things that the Father hath are mine."—"Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." "All mine, (in the neuter gender, implying all things, as well as all persons) are thine, and thine are mine," and others of similar import, (John xi. 25; xiv. 7, 9, 10; xvi. 15—24; xvii. 5—10). If Christ be no more than a man, or a created being, such language can only serve to perplex a plain subject, and mislead a simple reader: and it is plain, that much learning, ingenuity, and labour are required to put any plausible sense upon it, when his Deity is denied.

But our Lord's repeated promises of sending the Holy Spirit to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, to glorify him, and to teach and comfort his disciples, &c., require a more particular consideration. Without anticipating the subject of a future Essay, on the Deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, we may assert without hesitation, that such promises could not properly have been given by any mere servant of God. The Holy Spirit must denote either a Divine Person, or the one living and true God, operating in a peculiar manner on the minds of men; and is it not palpably absurd to suppose, that any mere creature should direct, or send, the Spirit of God, in either of these senses? The believer's union with Christ, and with the Father through him, has sometimes been considered as coincident with our Lord's union with the Father: but can it be thought, that any Christian is one with God in such a sense, that the Holy Spirit may as properly be called his Spirit, as the Spirit of God? Yet He is frequently called the Spirit of Christ, as sent by and proceeding from him, (John xv. 26; xvi. 7, 10, 13, 15; xvii. 21; Rom. viii. 9—11). Indeed the words of Christ, by which the promise of the Spirit is introduced, are very remarkable: "Whatsoever ye ask in my name, *I will do it.*" (John xiv. 13—18).

The language of his disciples should also be noticed. They repeatedly observe, "that he knew the thoughts of men:" and John expressly says, "that he knew all men; and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew *what was in man,*" (John ii. 25; 2 Chron. vi. 30; Jer. xvii. 9, 10). If this were not an undeniable ascription of omniscience, Peter certainly appealed to that divine attribute without any reserve, when he said, "Lord, *thou knowest all things,* thou knowest that I love thee," (John xxi. 17). The attentive reader of the evangelists will observe for himself many expressions of a similar nature, which are never used of prophets, apostles, or angels; these serve to show us what the disciples thought of their Lord; and John remarks, that by his miracles "he manifested forth his glory;" whereas all other servants of God referred all their works to his glory alone, (John ii. 11).

The testimony of John Baptist is peculiarly important in this inquiry. "He was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb;" being "more than a prophet, and great in the sight of the Lord, above all that had been

Digitized by Google

born of woman," (Luke i. 15; vii. 26—28). Yet he deemed himself unworthy to loose the Redeemer's shoe-latchet;" he declared, that "of his fullness he and all his fellow-servants had received;" that "he needed to be baptised of him;" and that "he came from heaven, and was above all." And though Jesus was the younger man, yet John assigned, as the reason why he was preferred before him, "that he *was* before him," which is absolutely decisive in respect of his pre-existence, (Matt. iii. 11—14; John i. 15, 16; iii. 27—36). Thus this most excellent servant of God abased himself, and exalted the Saviour; and in this was a perfect contrast to those, who manifestly exalt themselves and degrade Him. The words of Gabriel to Zacharias concerning John, are also very remarkable, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God, and he shall go before Him," (even before the Lord his God), "in the spirit and power of Elias," &c. John was the forerunner of Christ, and was sent to prepare his way before him. Who then can doubt, but the angel considered the Messiah (that was about to appear as Emmanuel), to be the Lord God of Israel? This the prophets had foretold, and one of them calls the Messenger or Angel of the Covenant, Jehovah, (Luke i. 16, 17; Isaiah xl. 3, 4, 10, 11; Malachi iii. 1). And we find Jehovah of Hosts repeatedly saying to another prophet, "thou shalt know that Jehovah of Hosts hath sent me to thee," (Zec. ii. 8—11; xiii. 7). However, when "the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among men," all his true disciples "saw his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," (John i. 14.)

IV. The works, which Christ hath undertaken, or performed, evince his Deity. He, "who created all things, and upholds them by the word of his power, came a Light into the world, to be the Light of the world," and to "enlighten every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 4—9; xii. 46). That eternal Life, which was with the Father, was manifested to be the life of men (1 John i. 1. 3). He hath engaged to give eternal life to all his true disciples, notwithstanding the opposition of all their enemies; to prepare mansions in heaven for them all; to receive them to himself; to raise all the dead by his word; to judge the whole world; and to destroy all his adversaries "with everlasting destruction, from his presence and from the glory of his power," by which "he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (2 Thess. i. 7—10; Phil. iii. 21). And can any thing suffice for this, except omnipotence and omniscience? The apostle speaks of Christians, as "looking for the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13). Now the great God will not appear at the day of judgment, in his Essence (for no man hath seen or can see him); but Christ will appear, as the great God our Saviour and Judge, in his own glory as Mediator, and in the glory of the Father; exercising all divine perfections and sovereign authority before the whole world. And indeed his language respecting that decisive season is uniformly majestic beyond expression, as every attentive reader must perceive. Moreover, Christ "is exalted to give repentance;" he is "the Author and Finisher of faith;" even when he was "in the form of a servant," "he had power on earth to forgive sins." "He has the keys of death, and the invisible world." "Angels, principalities, and powers are subject to him;" nay, they are "the angels of his power;" and "all creatures serve him." "Who then is this Son of David?" Is he not "the Son of God?" Is he not the *Root*, as well as the *Offspring* of David? who, therefore, in spirit "called him his Lord," many ages before he became his Son: for He is "the Lord of all," "the Lord of Glory," and "the Prince of life?"

It is absurd to ascribe all this to a derived and delegated power (except as his human nature is intended); for how can omnipotence, omniscience, or omnipresence be communicated or exercised by a mere creature? Moreover, Jehovah declares that "He made all things *by himself*;" and "will not give his glory to another; and that there is no God and Saviour besides Him," (Isaiah xliii. 10, 11; xliv. 8—24). Indeed, the authoritative manner in

Digitized by Google

which Christ wrought his miracles, in general without the least appearance of reliance on any power but his own, was very different from that of prophets or apostles; who took great care to have it understood, that they were merely the instruments of him in whose name they spoke.

V. The behaviour of our Lord towards those who honoured him, constitutes another argument of our doctrine. The servants of God have always been decided against every kind and degree of honour shown them, which seemed to interfere with the glory of God; and the Scriptures referred to put this beyond all doubt, (Gen. xli. 16; Dan. ii. 28—30; Acts iii. 12, 13; x. 25, 26; xiv. 14, 15; Rev. xix. 10; xxii. 9). Yet it is obvious, that Jesus did not object to similar honours; nay, that "he most honoured those who thus honoured him," (1 Sam. ii. 30); and approved of men in exact proportion as they had high thoughts of, and large expectations from him. Nor is there a single exception from this rule, in his whole history; for his answer to the young ruler who called him "good teacher," was an intimation that he did not think highly enough of him, and misapplied the epithet *good* to one, whom he deemed a mere man like himself. When the centurion compared his power over all diseases, even in such as were at a distance, to his own authority over his soldiers and servants, he highly commended the greatness of his faith, (Matt. viii. 8—10). When the afflicted parent besought him "to help his unbelief;" and when the disciples desired "him to increase their faith," no intimation was given that their language was improper: but who can believe, that apostles would have approved of such requests being made to them? (Mark ix. 24; Luke xvii. 5). He received, without reserve, that prostration or worship, against which prophets, apostles, and angels, decidedly protested, when paid to them, (Matt. viii. 2; xv. 25; Luke xvii. 16; John ix. 35—38): and when various opinions were formed of him, he always best approved of those that thought most highly of him, and even suggested still more exalted apprehensions of his glory, (Matt. xvi. 13—19; John xi. 21—27). Now by what means can we account for this? Must we not conclude, either that the servants were more humble and more jealous of the glory of God, than his beloved Son; or that Christ was conscious, "that all men ought to honour him, even as they honoured the Father?" for it is manifest, that he readily accepted of those honours which they most strenuously refused.

VI. The undeniable instances of divine worship paid to Christ, constitute another most conclusive argument. Worship (properly so called) is an ascription of the peculiar honours of the Deity to any being. To supplicate a creature, though visibly present, for those blessings which God alone can bestow, is idolatry; because omnipotence is ascribed to a creature: and it is the same to pray to any being, when not sensibly present, even for such deliverances as a creature might afford, because it ascribes to it omnipresence or omniscience; which proves all the prayers of papists to saints and angels to be idolatry. The petitions before mentioned, for "increase of faith," &c. were acts of worship paid to Christ, as was the address of Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" nor would any holy man or angel have received them. The form of baptism, "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," must be an appointed adoration of the Son and Holy Spirit; or we must admit the greatest absurdities. No doubt Stephen worshipped Christ when he prayed to him to receive his spirit, and not to impute his death to his murderers; otherwise he might deny Christ's own prayers to the same effect when he hung on the cross, to be an adoration of the Father, (Luke xxiii. 34, 46; Acts vii. 59, 60). What candid person can deny, that Paul addressed Christ concerning "the thorn in his flesh;" seeing, when the Lord answered, that "his grace was sufficient for him," he even gloried in his infirmities, that "*the power of Christ* might rest upon him?" (2 Cor. xii. 7—10). Did he not pray to Christ when he said, "now God himself, and our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you," &c. And "now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, comfort

Digitized by Google

your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work?" (1 Thess. iii. 11—13; 2 Thess. ii. 16—17). Such instances show how familiar it was to the apostle "to honour the Son, even as he honoured the Father:" and as tending to the glory of God the Father," (Phil. ii. 11). The apostolical blessing is an act of worship coincident with that appointed by Moses (Num. vi. 24—27; 2 Cor. xiii. 14), yet Christ and the Holy Spirit are joined in it; and doubtless he was prayed to, whenever grace and "peace" (the sum of all spiritual blessings) were sought "from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Indeed, it was the grand peculiarity of Christians, that "they called on the name of the Lord Jesus," (Acts ix. 14, 21); and they who have attempted to interpret such expressions in some other sense, do as little credit to their critical talents as to their orthodoxy. Not to multiply instances to which some possible objection might be made, the words of Peter, (2 Pet. iii. 18) are incapable of any other construction. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

As all the angels of God were commanded to worship his incarnate Son; so, when a door was opened in heaven, all the angelic hosts are introduced as joining the company of redeemed sinners, in ascribing eternal honour and praise to "the Lamb that was slain," in union with "Him that sitteth on the Throne" (Rev. v, vii.) No words can possibly be more emphatical, than those used on this occasion: can any man, therefore, after reading them, assert, that Christ is a mere created being? Or that it is idolatry to worship him? Or will he pretend to believe that book to be "the unerring word of God;" or can he disprove its divine inspiration: when its prophecies have been so remarkably accomplished? This shows that our version is faithful in another place (Rev. i. 5, 6;) and that every Christian ought to join the saints of old, in saying, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,—be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

VII. Lastly, our doctrine is confirmed by the absurdities into which its most able opposers have been driven. Such men have principally laboured to invalidate those texts, that seem most explicit on this subject; though we could prove our doctrine, even if these evidences were set aside: and for this reason I have not adduced one testimony, which is decisive if genuine (as I suppose it to be;) because its authenticity has been so much disputed (1 John v. 7, 8.) A short specimen, however, may show with what success they have laboured, who deny the Deity of Christ. The psalmist, and from him the apostle, says of the Messiah, "Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever, &c." (Psal. xlv. 6, 7; Heb. i. 8, 9:) To elude the obvious inference from this text, it hath been said, that the words may be rendered, "God is thy throne for ever and ever." We read that heaven is God's throne, and the earth is his footstool; but who ever thought of God himself being the throne, on which a creature was to reign to eternity? Instead of "God was manifested in the flesh;" some would read it, "*who* was manifested in the flesh;" in which case *God* must be the antecedent, as the context shows, and the sense remains precisely the same (1 Tim. iii. 15, 16.) Others would read it, "*which* (mystery) was manifested in the flesh;" and then which mystery must be the nominative case to all the subsequent clauses in the verse; but whatever may be thought of the other propositions "which mystery was received up into glory," will scarce be deemed the language of inspiration by any, who do not prefer nonsense to orthodoxy. But sometimes they seem disposed to retain our reading, and to explain the expression to mean, "the wisdom and power of God being conspicuous in Christ;" which would be also true of Peter, or Moses; and so this great mystery of godliness at length is found to be no mystery at all! When incredulous Thomas was at last convinced of Christ's resurrection he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!" And it cannot seem wonderful to those, who consider that he knew the Messiah was to be called Emmanuel, and had heard him say, "he that hath seen me hath seen the

Digitized by Google

Father," &c., that he should be convinced of his Deity by his resurrection from the dead (John xx. 26—31; Rom. i. 2, 3.) To set aside this testimony, it hath been said, that the apostle's words were the language of astonishment, and not of adoration; as men often exclaim, *my God*, when greatly surprised. But are not such exclamations manifest violations of the third commandment, and certain proofs of men's irreverent contempt of the name of God? Who then can believe, that the apostles used such profane language before Christ, without meeting with the least reproof for it? (Matt. v. 37.) Surely such a solution must be improbable in the highest degree; and they, who can admit it, have no right to despise other men's credulity! But indeed, the words do not admit of any such construction, consistent with the idiom of the original language. That most august passage, with which John opens his Gospel, has been so construed, in order to evade our inference from it, that the nominative case to the verbs used in it must be changed again and again, without the least intimation given of it; contrary to all the rules of grammar. At other times, *the Word* is supposed to mean nothing more than the energy or power of God, which was eternally with him and essential to him, by which he made the world, and which was manifested in the man Jesus: but can any man in his senses suppose, that this was all the meaning of the apostle's introduction to his Gospel, of the sublime things he says of the Word; and his becoming flesh and dwelling among us? If any one should think so for a moment, a second attentive perusal must surely convince him of his mistake. Aware of this, it is now deemed convenient to set it aside, as no part of revelation. The interpretation given of another decisive evidence (Phil. ii. 5—10) is grounded on a proposed different translation, implying "that Christ did not think of such a robbery, as that of being equal with God." But, not to mention the various expressions used by our Lord, which certainly were thus understood by the Jews; who can believe, that the apostle should propose to his brethren, as a perfect example of humility, the conduct of a mere man, or creature, who barely did not claim equality with the eternal God; which could be no more than an exemption from the very summit of all possible pride and ambition? His argument (as well as the meaning of the words) proves, that "being in the form of God," signifies, being truly God, and appearing so; even as the form of a servant and the fashion of man signify being truly man: and how could a mere creature "*take upon him* the form of a servant," seeing he must always have been a servant of his Maker? To render the words of Paul (Rom. ix. 5,) "God over all, blessed for ever," would reduce his language to absurdity; for what could he then mean by saying, "of whom, *as concerning the flesh*, Christ came?" Did ever historian describe the descent of a prince in such language? and would it not be ridiculous in him to do so? Stephen's dying address to Christ has lately been considered, "as the words of a man, in an extacy of devotion, or in the agonies of death," and, therefore, not of much weight in the argument: as if modern reasoners could better direct our faith and worship, than this proto-martyr, when full of the Holy Ghost, favoured with the visions of God, and replete with the light of heaven! What shall we say to Paul's words? (2 Cor. viii. 9) could he, who was born in a stable, had not where to lay his head, and died on a cross, be rich before he was poor; if he had not existed before he became man? The words of Christ, which his disciples thought so plain (John xvi. 28,) and many other declarations he made, "that he came down from heaven," &c., so pressed the ancient Socinians, as to induce them to feign, that Jesus, like Mahomet, went to heaven to receive his instructions, previous to his entrance on his ministry. But modern Socinians have given up this figment: they seem conscious of their inability to maintain their old ground; and, therefore, they now intimate, that apostles and evangelists were mistaken, and that several books of the scripture are not authentic. Thus they save themselves much trouble, by answering all our witnesses at once: and doubtless they act prudently, in imitating the church of Rome, by constituting themselves judges of the scrip-

Digitized by Google

ture, determining what parts of it are authentic, and making their own scheme the standard, by which it is to be interpreted: for neither of their systems can subsist, except by a proportionable disregard to, and degradation of the word of God. I feel a confidence, that each of the arguments here adduced are separately conclusive: how great then must be the united force of them? Yet only a small part of the evidence can be contained in so brief an essay. I would therefore conclude, with observing, that the scriptures were written to recover men from idolatry to the worship of the true God: and that idolatry consists in worshipping such as *by nature* are no gods. What then shall we think of all the texts here adduced, if Christ be not God; or what shall we say to John's conclusion of his epistle? Having mentioned Jesus Christ, he adds, "This person (ουτος) is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John v. 20, 21.)

ESSAY VII.

On the Doctrine of our Lord's Deity, showing it to be Essential to Christianity; with a Brief Answer to some Objections.

We may not, in all cases, be able to determine exactly what things are essential to our holy religion, and what are not; yet the Scriptures most evidently declare some particulars to be so; and I cannot but consider the doctrine of our Lord's Deity as one of these, nor hesitate to say, that Christianity itself must stand or fall with it. The greater decision is proper on this subject, as our opponents seem lately to have shifted their ground: they used to say, that "Christ's divinity was the master-piece of absurdities—directly contrary to every part of natural and revealed religion, and to all the rational faculties God has given us:" "that a deceived heart had turned those aside who hold the doctrine:" and "that, by making more Gods than one, it was a breach of the first commandment," &c. This was a direct charge of gross idolatry (which surely must be a mortal sin:) and as the defenders of the doctrine denied, and even retorted the charge (showing, that another god is substituted by Socinians in the place of the God of the Bible,) the cause was fairly at issue, and was allowed to be of the greatest possible importance, and therefore entitled to the most careful, serious, and impartial investigation. But at present men are generally put off their guard by the plausible and indolent sentiment, that speculative opinions are of little consequence, and that doctrinal errors will not condemn those who are sincere and lead good lives. And an attempt has lately been made, by a champion of the party,* to persuade a very large body of men, who universally profess the doctrine of Christ's Deity, that there is no essential difference between them and the Socinians! On the other hand, some able defenders of the doctrine seem disposed to allow, that the belief of it is not necessary to salvation, or essential to Christianity; nay, that they, who most strenuously oppose it (and not always in the most unexceptionable manner,) may yet be accepted of God as sincere believers. Thus the subject, which used to be considered as of the utmost importance, is now generally thought to be rather a matter of doubtful disputation among Christians, than immediately connected with our eternal interests; and the cause hath more to fear from the indolent and contemptuous indifference of mankind, as to theological questions, which are not supposed essential to salvation, than from the most strenuous and ingenious efforts of its most learned opponents.

I shall therefore endeavour, in this essay, to show, that the doctrine of our Lord's Deity is essential to the faith and hope of a Christian: and this

* Dr. Priestley's Address to the Methodists; Preface to the Letters of the Wesleys.

Digitized by Google

will introduce many arguments in proof of it, which have not before been adverted to.

I. There are several texts of Scripture which expressly prove the point. The Lord Jesus himself declares, "that the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father: he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father," &c. (John v. 22, 23.) If then, the doctrine of his Deity be true, and if the very end of his mediatory authority, as the Son of man, (ver. 27), were this, that all men should honour him with the same kind and degree of honour that is shown to the Father, then such persons as deny his Deity, refuse to worship him, and spend their lives, with all their power, to draw men off from this faith and worship, do not honour him at all, but greatly degrade him; and therefore by the verdict of their future Judge, they "do not honour the Father that sent him." So that, if our doctrine be true, it must be essential to Christianity. It appears, from Scripture already referred to, (Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22), that they have no true knowledge of the Father, who do not receive it from the revelation made of him by the Son; but how can that man be thought to learn the knowledge of the Father from the Son, who disregards his express declarations, "that He and the Father are one;" "He that hath seen him hath seen the Father," &c.? If these words do indeed imply the Deity of the Son as one with the Father, the knowledge of God, which they who deny his Deity possess, cannot accord to the revelation made to the Son, but must be of another nature. The apostle says, (1 John ii. 22, 23,) "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." But can any man suppose this related only to a denial that Jesus was the Messiah? If this were all that was meant, then only avowed unbelievers were concerned in the warning; whereas it is manifest, that the apostle spoke of those who *seduced*, not such as *opposed* his Christian brethren; and who, by denying Jesus to be the Son of God, drew them off from the true doctrine in that particular. As therefore, they "who denied the Son, had not the Father," the inference is unavoidable, that they who deny the Scripture doctrine concerning the Son of God, (whatever that doctrine be), have not the Father for their God and portion. Many errors relate to different parts of the structure, the removal of which (though ill spared) may not wholly subvert it; but this concerns the foundation, and is of fatal consequence, "for other foundation can no man lay," &c. (1 Cor. iii. 10—15). Again, the apostle (1 John iv. 2—6) lays it down as a rule, that the truth was to be known by its agreement with the doctrine taught by him and his brethren, "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" and that every tenet, however supported, must be a doctrine of Antichrist, which accorded not with what they had taught concerning the person of Christ. According to this rule, all pretences to new revelations, and every philosophical reasoning, must be wholly disregarded, as springing from the spirit of error, if they contradict the testimony of the apostles, as recorded in the Scriptures; and if this error relate to the person of Christ, it is of Antichrist. It may be allowed, that, by "coming in the flesh," the reality of our Lord's human nature was maintained: but who could have doubted, that he was *really a man*, if it had been generally believed, that he was *no more than a man*? And if he could not have come otherwise than *in the flesh*, the apostle would hardly have made that an essential part of his confession. But the coming of the only begotten Son of God in the flesh, as the anointed King, Priest, and Prophet of the church, was indeed essential to his doctrine; and they who denied it, must reject or pervert all the rest. Some of those heretics whom John here so strenuously opposed, as the forerunners of the principal Antichrist, were the very persons whom certain modern Unitarians would persuade us to regard as the only primitive Christians who retained the faith of the gospel in its original purity! Afterwards the same apostle, (1 John v. 10—13) declares, that the principal testimony of God related to his Son; and that he who believes not this testimony, "hath made him a liar, because he believeth not

Digitized by Google

the testimony which God hath given of his Son," &c. As all revelation centres in this point, it is vain for a man to pretend that he believes other parts of it, whilst he rejects its principal doctrine. His *opinion* may indeed accord with the testimony of God in some particulars; he may assent to Scripture truths, because he thinks they may be *otherwise* proved; but if his own reasonings, or those of some philosopher, lead to conclusions opposite to the word of God, he hesitates not to treat that as a lie. So that, in fact, such men do not believe God, but other witnesses, when they assent to Scripture truths; for they treat him as a false witness, when he contradicts their preconceived opinions. Whence it is evident, that no man's belief of the Bible, or of any thing contained in it, can be genuine, whilst he rejects "the testimony which God hath given of his Son." This also illustrates all those other passages in which it is declared, that "he that believeth not shall be damned:" that "he who believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him," &c.; because it hence appears, that they treat the truth of God as a lie, and so exclude themselves from that salvation which is in Christ Jesus for sinners, that by faith apply for an interest in it. And a man cannot believe the Son, if he refuse to credit what he says of himself, as One with the Father, &c. The same important caution is again inculcated by the apostle, (2 John 7—11), who declares the man "to be a deceiver and an antichrist, who confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," and that "whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." Now the doctrine of Christ must have relation to his person, either as God and man, or merely man. But if he that abode not in that doctrine had not God, and if the Christians were forbidden to receive him into their houses, or bid him God speed, or at all to sanction his delusions, (though they might doubtless have relieved his urgent wants, as an enemy in distress), it must follow, that the doctrine concerning the person of Christ is essential to Christianity, and a rejection of the true doctrine is an antichristian departure from the faith. And I appeal to every impartial man to determine, whether such language, if we had first used it, would not have excited the sneer of numbers, and an outcry of bigotry against us. The reader must observe, that the texts here quoted are not brought as direct proofs of our Lord's Deity, (though many of them do prove it), but to show that a right faith in this respect is essential to salvation by Christ; and they doubtless so far establish this point, that they who treat such questions as immaterial, will find it most convenient wholly to overlook them, or to deny them to be the unerring dictates of the Spirit of Truth.

II. The peculiar nature of our Lord's mediation warrants the same conclusion. The office of mediator, between two parties who are at variance, seems to imply, that the person performing it stands in some relation to each party; is likely to take care of the interests of both in an equitable manner; and possesses influence (either from excellency of character, dignity of rank, or services performed) to give weight to his interposition. Now Jesus is Mediator between the great Creator and holy Governor of the universe, and his unholy, rebellious creatures; and it is supposed, that there are those things in his character, &c., for the sake of which the Father is pleased to pardon and bless them in behalf of whom he mediates. But (not to anticipate the subject of a future Essay,) it suffices to observe at present, that if the Father saw it necessary for the display of his glory in the salvation of sinners, that the Mediator should be Emmanuel, his co-equal Son in human nature, God manifest in the flesh; and that it was wholly improper for any other person to sustain this office, or approach him in this character, except his well-beloved Son in whom he is well pleased; and if sinners pertinaciously reject his authenticated testimony to this divine Mediator, and will regard him as a mere man, they must exclude themselves from the benefit of this gracious constitution, and exceedingly affront both the Father and the Son. And can it be supposed that they are taught by that Spirit, whose office it is to glorify Christ, when they thus studiously degrade him? And

Digitized by Google

yet, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Indeed, it will be shown, in due time, that the mediation of Christ is the grand display of the divine glory, of the honour of the law, of the evil of sin, &c.; and, in this view of it, the personal dignity of Christ, (like the centre stone of an arch) sustains the whole; take that away, the whole must fall, either at once, or by degrees. And do not facts prove, that they who deny the Deity of Christ, soon learn to explain away the doctrine of the atonement? And that of his intercession and priestly character is proportionably disregarded: the evil and desert of sin then seem to vanish from their view; they have little fear of future punishment, but object to the plain language of Scripture on that subject; this makes way for doubts about the authenticity or divine inspiration of the sacred oracles, and often terminates in rejecting them: and, when such men are still pressed with difficulties from undeniable facts, they proceed to deny the providence, and then the very being of a God. It is manifest, that this hath been the unhappy progress of many: when the Deity of Christ is denied, his mediation cannot consistently be maintained; and when that is rejected, the book, in which it is the principal subject, must soon sink into insignificancy at least, and be treated with neglect.

III. The peculiar nature of the faith, love, &c., which the word of God requires us to exercise towards the Lord Jesus, confirms the point in question. The prophet says, (Jer. xvii. 5, 6), Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm," &c. And the Psalmist (Psalm cxlvi. 3) says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help:" yet nothing can be plainer, than that we are required to put our trust in Christ; and if he were only the son of man, and had only an arm of flesh, I cannot see how we could trust in him, without in heart departing from the Lord. The form of baptism, into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, implies a professed dependence for salvation on the Son, and on the Holy Ghost, and a devoted, faithful attachment to them, as well as to the Father. The expression, "believe *in* the Son of God," implies not only an assent to his truths, but a reliance on him for all the blessings which he is exalted to bestow. The apostle describes Christians as those "who trusted in Christ," (Eph. i. 12). Faith, or its inseparable effect, is commonly described by "coming to Christ," "receiving him," "abiding in him," &c.: and such expressions must imply application to, and habitual dependence on him, even now he is invisible to us, and not present in his human nature. We are commanded to "walk in him," which must include a constant reliance on his power, truth, and love, as well as a regard to his authority, (Col. ii. 6, 7). "He suffered being tempted, that he might be able to succour us when tempted," (Heb. ii. 17, 18). Does not this teach us to apply to and rely on him in our temptations? He promised his disciples a mouth and wisdom, (Luke xxi. 15): ought they not, therefore, to rely on him to fulfil that promise? Can he be our life, unless we depend on him for the life of our souls? (Col. iii. 1—4). Does he forgive sins? (ver. 13) and ought not the sinner to rely on him for pardon? Does he send the Holy Spirit to teach, comfort, and sanctify his people? and ought we not to depend on him for that blessing? Hath he all power in heaven and earth? and shall we do wrong to trust that power in all circumstances? Has he engaged to be with his assembled disciples? and should they not expect and depend on his gracious presence? (John xiv. 20—24). In short, the believer can do nothing of himself, and "can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him." "He has communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ:" and how can this be, unless he habitually relies on, and applies to him for every thing? If men do not trust in Christ, they can experience no communications from him, nor maintain any intercourse with him; and it is no wonder that they deride those as enthusiasts, who experience what they despise. But surely it would be idolatry to rely on a mere creature, in the manner that hath been stated; if then such a dependence on

Digitized by Google

Christ be essential to faith, the doctrine of his Deity must be essential also; for no man can *reasonably* rely on a mere creature to forgive his sins, to sanctify his soul, to raise his body from the grave, and to give him eternal life. To form such expectations from him, we must believe that he is "God over all, blessed for evermore;" "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii, 8; Rev. i, 4; xi, 17). In like manner, the love, which Christ demands of us, cannot belong to any mere creature; we are required to love him more than our nearest relatives, or even than our own lives; nay, to hate all these, when they come in competition with our love to him, otherwise we are not worthy of him, and cannot be his disciples (Matt. x, 37; Luke xiv, 26). Now, what is this but to love him supremely, and as we should love the Father? Nor are we once cautioned not to let our love of Christ interfere with "that love of God with all our hearts" which the law requires: it is not intimated, that there is any incongruity, disparity, or even distinction, between our love of the Father, and of the Son: nay, the more we love Christ, the greater our love of the Father is supposed to be, and the more shall we be loved of him (John viii. 42; xiv. 21—24; xv. 23.) The decisions of the great day of account are represented as to be awarded by this rule; they, who have loved Christ, and shown their love to him by kindness to his disciples for his sake, will be considered as true believers and righteous persons: they, who shall be proved not to have loved him, by their neglect of his poor disciples, will be considered as unbelievers, and impenitent sinners, and condemned to have their portion with the wicked (Matt. xxv. 31—46.) But can we suppose, that no mention would on this occasion be made of the love of God, if the love of Christ had been entirely distinct from it, or if it were not certain, that the more we love the Son, the more we love the Father that sent him? Thus the apostle's benediction includes all "that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;" he denounces an awful curse on every man who does not love him (Eph. vi. 24; 1 Cor. xvi. 22:) and he represents the love of Christ as the constraining principle of all his own devoted labours and services (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.) Another apostle speaks of the love of an unseen Saviour, as the universal experience of all Christians (1 Pet i. 8:) and when that apostle denied his Lord, he was thrice interrogated, whether he loved him, before he was re-instated in his pastoral office (John xxi. 15—17.) But no such special and pre-eminent love towards any one of the mere servants of God is required of us; nay, the apostle was afraid lest he or his brethren should be put in Christ's place, when he inquired, "was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. i. 13.) Yet our Lord never intimated that there was any danger, lest his disciples should love him, in a degree, that would be derogatory to the rights of God the Father, who is a jealous God, and cannot endure a rival in our affections, but demands our whole heart. How then can Christ dwell in our hearts, as Lord of our affections, if he and the Father be not One? As therefore we ought to love Christ, even as we love the Father; it must be necessary that we believe him to be the adequate object of that love; both for what he is in himself, and what he hath done for us; and thus the doctrine of his Deity, if true, must be essential; and unless we believe it, how can we keep clear of the apostle's anathema?

Moreover, we are constantly reminded, that we are not our own but the Lord's; we are his property, because he made us: and, when by sin we had alienated ourselves, we became his again, "bought with a price, to glorify him, in body and spirit, which are his" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; x. 31.) Yet the apostles always speak of believers as belonging to Christ; they are his servants, his purchased flock, his espoused bride (though the Lord of Hosts is called the husband of the church, Isa. liv. 5,) the members of his body, &c. St. Paul says, in one place, that "he was dead to the law, that he might live unto God; in another, "that he lived no longer to himself, but to him who died for him and rose again;" and that "Christ died and rose again, that he might be the Lord, both of the living and of the dead" (Rom. xiv. 8, 9;

Digitized by Google

2 Cor. v. 14; Gal. ii. 19). And he observes, that the Lord Jesus "redeemed us from all iniquity, and purifies us *unto himself*, to be a peculiar people," &c. (Tit. ii. 14). Could such language as this be properly used concerning services to be rendered to a mere man? Surely this would be an idolatrous alienation of ourselves from the service of our Maker to devote ourselves to that of a fellow-creature. But if Christ be truly God, one with the Father, then our dedication of ourselves to his service is the same as our devoted obedience to the Father that sent him; and is no other than the prescribed manner in which, as redeemed sinners, we are required to render it. In short, it must be evident to all who reverence the language of Scripture, that we honour, obey, and worship the Father, when we honour, obey, and worship the Son; and that all the glory rendered to the Son redounds to the glory of the Father, "who is glorified in the Son," (John xiii. 31, 32; xvii. 1—10; Phil. i. 20; ii. 11). Who can believe that it should be the office of the Holy Spirit to "glorify Christ," if it be of little or no consequence what men think of his person, or if proper views of it are not essential to Christianity? or that the apostle, in this case, would have spoken of his "name being glorified" in and by his saints, both now and at the day of judgment? (2 Thess. i. 10—12). If Jesus were only a mere creature, Jehovah would give his glory to another, if he inspired his servants to use such language: so that the confidence, love, gratitude, devotedness of heart, and the honour which the Scriptures require us to render to Christ, must be impracticable, unless we have a proper judgment of his dignity and excellency; and we must either rob him of the glory due to his name, or give Jehovah's glory to another, if we mistake in this fundamental matter.

IV. The nature of heavenly felicity evinces this. The language of the apostle is emphatical, "To depart hence, and to be with Christ, which is far better;" for this implies, that the presence of Christ, the discoveries of his glory, and the enjoyment of his love, constitute the happiness for which he longed, (Phil. i. 23; John xvii. 24); and wherein does this differ from the beatific vision? But in the last chapters of Revelation, which describe the heavenly state, this is still more plainly declared. He whose name is "Alpha and Omega," says, "I will give him that is athirst of the water of life freely: he that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my Son," (xxi. 6, 7). If any person should explain this passage of the Father, it would only prove, that "the Father and the Son are one;" for the Son is doubtless called Alpha and Omega, &c. Again, the apostle "saw no temple" in the New Jerusalem, "for the Lord God Almighty *and the Lamb* are the temple of it: and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof," (xxi. 22, 23). He next saw a "pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and *of the Lamb*,"—"neither was there any more curse, but the throne of God, and *of the Lamb*, shall be in it, and *his* servants shall serve *him*; and they shall see *his* face, and his name shall be in their foreheads," (xxii. 1—5). Can any thing be plainer, than that the writer of this book believed the Son was one with, and equal to the Father: the fountain of light, life, purity, and felicity; in whose presence is fulness of joy, and pleasures at his right hand for evermore? (vii. 16, 17). It is also manifest, that the worship of heaven is represented as a constant ascription of praise and honour to Christ together with the Father: yet we cannot sing on earth the very words of the heavenly choir, with apparent fervour, and unreserved approbation, without danger of being deemed enthusiasts; as is manifest from the care taken by many persons to expunge every expression of this kind from their books of psalms and hymns for public worship, as well as from their other services. Will there then be discordant companies of worshippers in heaven? Or, if all must be harmonious, are we never to learn the song of the redeemed till we come to heaven? Or how can we learn this song, if we never come to a settled determination in our minds, whether the Lamb that was slain be worthy of all worship and ho-

Digitized by Google

nour, or not? or if it be indifferent whether we adore and expect felicity from him as God, or only respect his memory as a good man?

V. Lastly, the language of authority, which we are certified that our future Judge will use at the last day, should not pass unnoticed in this argument. As the happiness of heaven is represented under the idea of entering into his joy, and beholding his glory, &c. (Luke xii. 37; Matt. xxv. 21): so the misery of the wicked is spoken of, as a banishment from his presence, and the endurance of his wrath. He will not say, "Depart from God," but "Depart from me," (Matt. xxv. 41; 2 Thess. i. 9, 10). And in a figurative description of the great consternation of his enemies, in which is an evident reference to the day of judgment, they are introduced as calling on the rocks and mountains "to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; for the day of his great wrath is come, and who is able to abide it?" (Rev. vi. 16, 17). If then we believe that "he shall come to be our Judge," it must be of the greatest importance that we know who he is, by whom our eternal state is to be decided. For surely it will be very dreadful for those to meet him arrayed in glorious majesty, who, during their whole lives, refused him the honour he demanded, treated his declarations of his personal dignity as false or unmeaning, and continually uttered hard speeches against him! (Jude 14, 15; Rev. i. 7). If then the season of his coming be "the day of God," (2 Pet. iii. 12), it behoves every one of us to "prepare to meet our God," that we "may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

But to all these scriptural demonstrations of the truth and importance of this essential doctrine, some objections are opposed, which are considered as insurmountable—a few of them shall here be very briefly noticed. It is objected, that the Deity of Christ is inconsistent with the unity of God; or else, that it is irrational, unintelligible, and contradictory. But doubtless something more than confident assertion is requisite to prove the doctrine of the Trinity to be inconsistent with the Divine Unity. The apostle speaks of the body, soul, and spirit, as constituting the same individual man (though some perhaps may object to his language;) but if a man may be three in one respect, and one in another; do we know so much of God, as to assert it is impossible that somewhat similar, but far superior, and more entire, both in the distinction, and in the unity, should take place in his incomprehensible nature? And ought not men to speak more reverently and cautiously on a subject, about which we know nothing more, than what God himself hath taught us? Especially as so much is spoken in scripture, which appears to have this meaning, that the most of Christians in every age have thus understood it. We do not say, that the Deity is Three and One in the same sense; nor do we pretend to explain or comprehend how God subsists in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; but we would humbly believe his testimony concerning himself, and adore his incomprehensible majesty.

One would scarce have expected that the doctrine should have been objected to, because it is so mysterious; when the apostle expressly calls it the great mystery of godliness. But indeed till we can comprehend ourselves, it is absurd to object to mysteries in those things which relate to the infinite God! The power of mind over matter is mysterious in the highest degree; yet our will moves our tongues and limbs continually; and we know not how: so that our own existence, as well as that of God, must be denied, if we admit it not. Mysteries are found in the production of every plant and animal, yea, in the growth of every blade of grass, which philosophy can never explain. The style of God, in all his works, is mystery; and shall we suppose that his own nature is not, above all, mysterious? Experiment is allowed to be the proper standard of our discoveries of the powers of nature: should not, then, the testimony of God concerning himself, terminate our inquiries concerning his incomprehensible Essence? For can we "by searching find out God? Can we find out the Almighty to perfection?" If men object Christ's inferiority as Man and Mediator to the Father; or his growth

Digitized by Google

in wisdom and stature, &c.; we answer, that such testimonies, when compared with those which ascribe omniscience, &c., to him, demonstrate that he had another nature, in union with his humanity, of which such things are spoken. And "his delivering up of the kingdom of God, even the Father" (1 Cor. xv. 24—28,) only establishes the distinction between the absolute and everlasting kingdom of God, as Creator; and the mediatorial kingdom of Christ, as the Divine Saviour of sinners. As the absolute kingdom existed before sin entered; so will it exist for ever, after the mediatorial kingdom hath answered its grand design, and is come to an end: but the Son will be One with the Father to eternity, as he was in the beginning, before time was, or creation had taken place.

If any person should be convinced, by these plain arguments, of the truth and importance of this doctrine, I would conclude with warning him not to rest *in the notion of it;* but to apply it practically, by relying on Emmanuel for all things belonging to salvation, and by rendering him that love and honour which are due to his Name. The truth held in unrighteousness can only increase a man's condemnation: but they, who deem it the life of their souls, should endeavour to adorn and promote the knowledge of it, by all suitable means: remembering, that "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (1 Tim. ii. 24—26.)

ESSAY VIII.

On the Nature and Design of the Mediatorial Office, sustained by the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE Mediation of Christ between a holy God and sinful men has an immediate connection with every part of that religion which bears his name: and all, who call themselves Christians, should use great diligence in seeking an accurate and adequate knowledge of this interesting subject, as far as they can deduce it from the sacred scriptures. It is, therefore, intended in this essay, to make some observations on Mediation in general;—to explain the nature and ends of our Lord's Mediation in particular;—to show in what respects he, and none else, was qualified to sustain such an office;—and to prove from Scripture, that he is a Mediator, in the sense that will be explained.

The interposition of a Mediator in the affairs of men implies, that some difference or ground of difference subsists between the two parties; it supposes that, at least, one of them has cause of complaint or resentment against the other; and that consequences injurious to one, or both of them, or to those connected with them, may be apprehended if the controversy be not amicably terminated. To prevent these effects, some person, either of his own accord, or at the request and by the appointment of one or both the contending parties, interposes: and endeavours by his authority, influence, or good offices, to effect a pacification on such terms as are supposed to be equitable, or at least not materially injurious to either party: for if a Mediator should take great care of the rights and interests of one party, and evidently neglect those of the other, he would be justly condemned for acting contrary to the design and nature of his office. He should therefore act as the friend of both; accommodating their differences according to the justice of their claims, and in a manner as satisfactory to each of them, as can consist with equity and impartiality.

Digitized by Google

In some cases a superior in station or power may assume the office of Mediator, and by authority induce the contending parties to accept of the terms proposed to each of them. In others, the end may be accomplished by argument, remonstrance, or persuasion: and this is nothing more than convincing both parties, that they ought to make, or accept of, such concessions for the sake of peace and their mutual good, as are equitable and reasonable; and then inducing them to act according to the dictates of their understanding and conscience. But sometimes (especially when one party is much inferior to the other, and hath been highly criminal or injurious), the office of a Mediator will chiefly consist, in prevailing with the offended superior to accept of such concessions and satisfaction as the other can make, and not to proceed against him with rigour, though he deserve it: and if this can be effected, it only remains for him to prevail with the inferior, or criminal party, to make the required concessions, &c. It may, however, so happen, on some occasions, that the Mediator, out of great love and pity to the offender, may offer to make compensation at his own expense, for the injuries he hath done; in order that the other party may without loss or dishonour lay aside his purposes of inflicting deserved punishment upon him. Various qualifications would be requisite for persons who should sustain the office of a Mediator between two parties at variance, in any of the cases which have been stated: but our attention should principally be fixed upon the last, as it doubtless most accords to the interesting subject which it is intended to illustrate. Should any one interpose between a sovereign prince and his rebellious subjects, in order to prevail with him to show them mercy, it is obvious that he should himself be free from all suspicion of the least favouring their rebellion; otherwise his interposition would render him the more suspected. He ought, moreover, to be a person of that rank and character, or to have done those important services, which entitle him to the confidence of his sovereign, and tend to render it honourable for him, at his instance, to pardon those that deserve punishment. Every one must perceive the absurdity of a criminal undertaking to mediate in behalf of his associates in guilt; nor could an obscure person, of indifferent character, and in no respect entitled to, or possessed of, the affection or confidence of the prince, attempt such an interposition, without manifest impropriety. If a company of men, in any such circumstances, were desirous of thus conciliating the favour of their offended lord, they would naturally turn their thoughts to one of his chief nobles, to some person that had performed signal services with great renown; or to his principal favourite, (Acts xii. 20); or even to his beloved Son, if they had any prospect or hope of obtaining his good offices. And if such a Mediator could be engaged in their behalf, with so firm and cordial an attachment to their cause as to say with Paul, when he mediated with Philemon for Onesimus, "if they have wronged thee, or owe thee aught, put that on mine account;—I will repay it," (Phil. 19, 20); and if he really were competent to make good such an engagement; then his interposition would have its utmost advantage for success.

But no Mediator can be fully authorized for his office, unless, by one means or other, both parties allow of his interference; at least his mediation cannot have its due effect, till they both accede to his terms or plan of accommodating their differences. For if one party authorize him to propose certain terms to the other, as the utmost that he will yield; the whole must yet be frustrated, and the dissension perpetuated, if these terms be pertinaciously rejected; except when the Mediator acts also as an umpire, and compels the parties to accept of his prescribed conditions. There is also an evident propriety in a Mediator's standing in such a relation to each of the parties, as to lay a foundation for his being considered as an equal friend to both of them, in all respects in which their rank or the justice of the cause will admit of it; so that there can be no reason to suspect, that a person, thus situated, will sacrifice the interests or rights of one party, from a partial regard to the other.

Digitized by Google

These observations concerning the office of a Mediator, as well known among men, may enable us to understand more clearly the doctrine of scripture respecting the Mediatorial Office of Emmanuel: and we may very properly argue from them, in something of the same manner that Paul did from the office of high-priest among the Jews, when he wrote to them concerning the high-priesthood of Christ. This, indeed, was a divinely-appointed type and shadow of the subject that the apostle illustrated and confirmed by it; whereas our arguments, from the office of a Mediator among men, derive their force from analogy, or the particulars in which the cases coincide: yet as the Lord himself has represented the office of Christ under the idea of a Mediator, it is manifest that he intended to assist, and not to mislead or confuse our apprehensions, by this allusion; and this authorizes us to make what use we can, with caution and sobriety, of the case alluded to, in order to explain more clearly the subject which is illustrated by it.

We must, therefore, in the next place, reflect on the need there was for "a Mediator between God and man." Had the human species never forfeited the favour, or incurred the displeasure of their bountiful Creator, a Mediator could never have been wanted, for he was of himself sufficiently disposed to favour and bless the work of his own hands. Had not man been brought into a state of alienation from God, and had he not been exposed to his just indignation, no reconciliation, and consequently no peace-maker could have been required. The angels in heaven approach their God and Father without the intervention of a Mediator; and so doubtless did man, before sin had made a breach between God and him. When the first Adam had broken the commandment, and forfeited the covenant of his Creator; and so sin and death had entered into the world, to pass upon the whole race that was about to descend from him; then was "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven," promised, to be the Mediator of a new covenant, under the title of "the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head." Thus the entrance of sin gave rise to the whole plan of a Mediator; and the malignity or desert of sin alone required such an exalted Mediator, and such a meritorious mediation, as the scripture reveals and proposes to us. For if a righteous and holy God had not viewed sin as so evil in its nature and effects, that it would be utterly inconsistent with his glory to show mercy to transgressors, unless some constitution of this kind were previously formed; that love, which provided the Mediator, would have sufficed (so to speak) to induce him to pardon them without one. We must not, therefore, imagine, that the Mediation of Christ is needful, in order to prevail with God to pity, love, and save sinners: on the contrary, we should consider it as the grand effect of his compassion and good will, and as intended to render the exercise of his plenteous mercy consistent with the honour of his justice, and conducive to the harmonious display of all his perfections.

Men had forfeited their Creator's favour, and deserved his anger, by transgression; they had also lost his holy image, and become vile and miserable, even "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction:" but it pleased their offended Sovereign, "to the praise of his glory," and the discovery of his infinite and everlasting mercy and bounty (for God is Love), to purpose the reconciliation, recovery, and eternal felicity of an innumerable multitude of the fallen race. It did not, however, become him, as the infinitely righteous and holy governor of the universe, to show such favour to the guilty and unholy, without adopting some decisive method of showing his judgment concerning their crimes and deserts: otherwise it might have been supposed, that he did not wholly abhor sin; that he meant to desist from the demands of his violated law; that it needed not to have been made so strict; that it was not requisite for his rational creatures on all occasions to obey it, or that transgressors should be punished according to its sanction; and that it was owing to some other cause, than his perfect justice and holy abhorrence of evil, that he so severely executed vengeance on some of his rebellious subjects. To obviate such conclusions, it became the God of glory to devise

Digitized by Google

some plan, according to which, the largest exercise of his pardoning mercy and saving grace might consist with the most affecting display of his avenging justice and hatred of iniquity. For this purpose, as is manifest from the Scriptures, his infinite wisdom and love had formed, and then revealed the plan of a Mediator, through whom a new covenant was arranged and proposed to sinners; according to which, all things pertaining to eternal life are freely bestowed for his sake, on all who apply for them in the appointed way. "Thus the riches of God's mercy have abounded towards us, in all wisdom and prudence," (Eph. i. 7, 8). Through the intervention of a Mediator sinners are saved, and yet the Lord does not so much as seem to favour sin; nay, he in the most decisive manner shows his judgment of what punishment it deserves, his holy abhorrence of it, and his determination in all possible cases, "to magnify his law and make it honourable."

If, in discoursing on such subjects, we are constrained to accommodate our language and reasonings to the conceptions and usages of men, we do no more than imitate the sacred writers, and can aptly express our meaning in the words which they have used before us: whereas they who object to such explanations, are obliged to represent the style of Scripture as highly (if not absurdly) figurative, and frequently to caution their disciples against a too literal explanation of it: nay, it costs them much labour, as well as great ingenuity, to furnish such interpretations as accord with their *rational* systems, and which common readers could never have thought of: and what is this but an insinuation that the sacred writers have used a language extremely suited to mislead and confuse the unlearned and simple part of mankind? But indeed the apostle has shown at large, (Rom. iii), that the mediation of Christ was intended especially for this end, "that God might be just and the justifier of the believer," "a just God and a Saviour."

If we examine the subject more minutely, we shall find, that the mediation of Christ is of that kind, which required such a person to sustain and perform it as the Scriptures testify him to be. If any one should interpose between an offended sovereign and his rebellious subjects, in order that, for his sake, exemption from punishment, and the grant of valuable privileges should be conferred on them; he must stand high in the estimation of the prince, and be a person of known worth and dignity among all who are acquainted with the transaction, otherwise there would be no ground to expect that his requests would be attended to, or any care taken, if they were to manifest the demerit of the pardoned offenders, or the clemency and bounty of their reconciled sovereign. But what man, or mere creature, could thus interpose between the infinite God and the apostate children of men? Who could have thought of requesting, that *for his sake*, and *at his instance*, all the crimes of those who came *in his name*, should be pardoned, all their wants supplied, and all spiritual and eternal blessings conferred upon them? Would not such an intrusion have been considered as an act of rebellion, or at least a preference given to the happiness of rebels above the glory of God? Who, among the angels of heaven, or any of the creatures that God has made, could pretend to personal dignity, excellency, merit, or services, sufficient to authorize such a requisition? Or how could it have been imagined, that if the Lord did not see good to spare and bless sinners for his own name's sake, he would be induced to do it for the sake of a derived, dependent being, who lived, moved, and existed in and by him alone? Had it been consistent with, or conducive to the display of his glory, to have saved sinners without an atonement, he would not have wanted any external inducement to do it: if it were not, could any one possibly prevail with him to dishonour himself? Or could any mere created being have undertaken to render the exercise of mercy and grace to sinners consistent with his perfect justice, and the honour of his law? Alas! their best services must all be due for themselves, and on account of benefits already conferred: even their own felicity, strictly speaking, must be gratuitous, not merited: nor hath one of them power to endure the punishment of a single transgression, without fi-

Digitized by Google

nally sinking under it, for the wages of sin is death. So that it cannot be conceived, that the office of a Mediator between God and man, which Christ performs, could possibly have been sustained by any mere creature; or that any of them had sufficient love to have induced him to undertake it for the benefit of the unholy and rebellious. But when the eternal Son of the Father,—when he who created and upholds all worlds, *for whom* all things were made, and whom all angels worship, voluntarily engaged himself to mediate a peace between the offended Sovereign of the universe and his sinful creatures: "to the principalities and powers in heavenly places was known—the manifold wisdom of God:" and all the holy intelligences that ever have been, or shall be made acquainted with this grand design, must perceive, that his personal dignity and excellence, his ineffable union with, and relation to the Father, as well as his boundless power, love, and holiness, rendered him in all respects the proper person to accomplish it, and bring it to a happy and glorious event; and that he only was competent for such an undertaking.

If a Mediator was to be constituted for such ends as have been stated, it must be proper that the Lord should choose and appoint him to this important office. "No one taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God." A self-appointed Mediator must have been deemed an intruder: the criminals could not reasonably expect to have the nomination of him; they had no just ground of complaint: the whole design must be formed for their relief and advantage; the rights and glory of God must be first considered and secured in the execution of it; and he alone could know whom it became him to entrust with so vast a concern, as involved in it not only the interests of his universal kingdom, but the eternal honour of his own great name. We know to whom he hath committed this office; and we are sure from the event, that he saw none else in heaven or earth whom he could so properly have appointed to it; for he does nothing in vain, and would not have sent his only begotten Son on a design which one of his servants could have executed with the same success and advantage. But we may understand enough in this matter to perceive that it would have been highly improper for the infinite God to have appointed a mere creature to such an office, and to have entrusted his own glory, the salvation of innumerable souls, and the interests of his everlasting kingdom into such hands: in such a cause, "he puts no trust in his servants, and charges even his angels with folly," (Job iv. 18). Yet, at the same time, this Mediator is, in all respects, suited to our case, and worthy of our confidence. If it had been revealed, that God would deal with us through a Mediator, and we had been required to look out for one on whom we could most entirely and unreservedly depend, even when eternal happiness or misery was at stake, what could we have done? We could never have entrusted such an important cause in the hands of any mere man: the more we had considered the matter in all its difficulties and consequences, the greater hesitation should we have felt to confide it to the hands of a mere creature, as all are changeable; and we should have been apprehensive, lest some want of power, love, truth, wisdom, or constancy should induce a failure, when our eternal all was at stake. But we could never have thought of such a Mediator as our offended God hath himself provided, appointed, and revealed, "who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," and who is "the true and the holy One," Emmanuel, "God over all, blessed for evermore." Here, then, we can have no ground for fear: unbelief alone can hesitate. He whose power sustains the universe, is able to save our souls in all possible cases. He who is worthy to be entrusted with the rights of God, and the eternal glory of his name, must also be worthy to be entrusted with our immortal interests (for our rights in this respect are all forfeited): and he who, perfect in justice and purity himself, could so pity and condescend to guilty, polluted creatures, as to undertake such an office wholly for their benefit, cannot want love to accomplish whatever is wanting for the eternal salvation of all who accept of his mediation.

Digitized by Google

But the appointed method in which this great Mediator performs his most gracious design, hath laid a still more firm foundation for our unshaken confidence. It was proper that the terms of our reconciliation should be proposed by the Lord himself; and as these related to the Mediator, they required him to assume our nature into personal union with his Deity, that, as "God manifest in the flesh," he might stand related to us also, in the most intimate manner, as our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; that so he might properly represent us, undertake our cause as interested in it by the ties of one common nature, and encourage our most unlimited confidence in his compassion and love. Thus hath he humbled, emptied, and impoverished himself; as they, in behalf of whom he mediated, "were partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same:" "he is not ashamed to call them brethren:" and now, as his union with the Father, in the divine nature, renders him a proper person to vindicate his rights, and display his glory; so, in virtue of his union with us in the human nature, we may most cheerfully rely on him to take care of our immortal souls. This also shows the propriety of his interposing in our behalf; for some connection or relation is supposed to subsist between the Mediator and those for whom he acts; else, why does he solicit favour for them, rather than for others in similar circumstances? And even if the plea be supported by some payment or satisfaction made, it seems proper that there should be a ground on which to determine for whom this should be done, and to whom the benefit of it should belong. When, therefore, the Son of God undertook the office of Mediator between God and man, he took not on him the nature of angels, as he meant not to mediate on their behalf; but he assumed the human nature: and this renders it very obvious and natural for us to conclude, that all he did and suffered on earth, and all he now performs in heaven, in the character of Mediator, was exclusively intended for the benefit of men, whose nature he bears, for whom he mediates, and to whose account the whole will be imputed, that is, to such of them as accede to, and avail themselves of his mediation. For this also must be taken into the account, as if men who have this divine constitution stated to them, with suitable evidence, do not approve of the Mediator, but reject his mediation, they of course exclude themselves from the benefit of it. We shall, in the two following Essays, consider more particularly the righteousness and atonement of our great Mediator, and his continual intercession in heaven for us. It is indeed almost impossible to discourse in general concerning his mediation, without in some degree adverting to these subjects, but it would be improper any farther to anticipate them in this place.

It does not seem necessary to attempt a laboured proof, that our Lord's mediation is of that nature, and instituted for the purposes which have been stated. The general language of Scripture conveys this idea of it, to those who understand and believe it in its obvious and literal import. In particular, the scope of St Paul's reasoning in the epistle to the Hebrews, establishes the doctrine under consideration. Was Moses a typical mediator, at the giving of the law, that through his intervention the national covenant might be ratified between God and the people? This only shadowed forth a better covenant, founded on better promises, which Christ hath mediated between the Lord and his spiritual Israel: and "this person was counted worthy of more honour than Moses, being a Son over his own house, which he had builded; whereas Moses was no more than a servant," or even a part of the house itself (Heb. iii. 1—6). Were the high priests, of the order of Aaron, typical mediators between God and the people, in virtue of their perpetual sacrifices, and burning of incense? The insufficiency and unprofitableness of such mediators, and all their sacrifices and services, must be shown, to make it manifest that another priest must arise, after another order, whose dignity, excellency, and invaluable ministrations might really effect those ends which the other merely prefigured and represented as in a picture, or rather as an indistinct and feeble shadow. So that through

Digitized by Google

Him, access was given to believers, to the mercy-seat of God, in the holy places not made with hands; whereas, before, the very shadow of this blessing was concealed by the veil; and none might approach to it on pain of death, but the high priest alone; nor he more than one day in a year, with the blood of the sacrifices, and the burning of incense. What do all these arguments (which fill up more than half this epistle) signify, but that Jesus is such a Mediator as hath been described? The apostle says, "that there is one Mediator between God and man; even the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.) No doubt he is truly man, and performs his mediation in human nature; for he assumed our flesh for this very purpose; but the apostle, by declaring him to be the one Mediator, excludes all other mediators. Moses, and the priests of Aaron's line were, in a certain sense, mediators between God and man; and every believer, when he prays for others, in some degree interposes his requests between God and them, to seek mercy in their behalf. Yet Christ is the only Mediator; because he alone is capable of, and appointed to perform such a mediation as hath been described, in virtue of his personal dignity and the ransom he hath made. "Through him we have access to the Father." He "is our Peace-maker;" "our Advocate with the Father." He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me," (John xiv. 6.) So that no man ever did, or ever will, find acceptance with God, who rejects Christ's mediation. We must come to God in his name, asking all blessings for his sake, and presenting all our services by his hands, and through his intercession, even "giving thanks to God and the Father through him."

In this view of the subject, we may consider Christ as the Mediator between God and man, in such a sense, that no sinner on earth can be found to whom we may not propose all the benefits of his mediation, provided he truly "come to God by faith in Christ;" whereas fallen angels, and those men who have died in their sins, are wholly excluded from this benefit by the very constitution of the covenant which he mediated. On the other hand, all other mediators, and all attempts to approach God without a Mediator, are an affront both to the Father and the Son; even as the sacrifices which Israelites offered contrary to the law were an abomination to the Lord. As, therefore, we must shortly meet our offended Sovereign at his awful tribunal, let us now avail ourselves of this inestimable appointment; and constantly approach his throne of grace, through our faithful and merciful "High-priest and Mediator; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need."

ESSAY IX.

On the Merits and Atonement of Christ.

The opinion, that the Deity might be appeased by expiatory sacrifices, has been very widely diffused among the human race; and the attempt has generally been made by shedding the blood, and burning a part of the body of some useful animal. This notion and practice seem very remote from the dictates of our natural reason: and it is extremely improbable, that they should have been the result of man's invention. We may, therefore, most rationally conclude, that it is wholly the doctrine of revelation, and the appointment of God, handed down by tradition from the progenitors of our race, to the several branches of their posterity; and it is certain that we meet with it in the Bible, immediately after the entrance of sin. When Cain's oblation of the first fruits of the earth was rejected, and Abel's sacrifice of the firstlings of the flock was accepted; we may naturally conclude, that the latter was presented according to the Divine appointment, and that

Digitized by Google

the former was not. But if we inquire into the reason of this appointment, the practice of the patriarchs, &c., and the multiplied precepts in the Mosaic law, as to this particular; we shall not easily arrive at any satisfactory solution, except we admit the doctrine of Christ's atonement, and suppose them to refer to him, as the substance of all these shadows. I shall, therefore, in this essay, endeavour to explain, illustrate, and prove this doctrine, and to show its importance in the Christian religion.

The rules and general usages respecting expiatory sacrifices, under the Old Testament, may assist us in understanding the nature of our Lord's atonement, of which they were types and prefigurations (Heb. x. 1.) The offender, whose crimes might be thus expiated, was required, according to the nature of the case, to bring "his offering of the flock, or of the herd, to the door of the tabernacle." The very nature of the animals appointed for sacrifice was significant; not the ferocious, the noxious, the subtle, or the unclean; but such as were gentle, docile, and valuable; and none of these were to be offered, but such as were "without blemish," or perfect in their kind. The offender was directed to bring an offering, in which he had a property, to be presented unto God, and thus substituted in his stead, for this particular purpose. He was then "to lay his hands upon the head" of the sacrifice, which denoted the *typical* translation of guilt from him, by the imputation to the substituted animal. This is generally thought to have been attended by a confession of his sins, and prayers for pardon, through the acceptance of his oblation: and doubtless it implied as much, and would be attended at least with secret devotions to that effect by every pious Israelite (Lev. i. 4; iii. 2; iv. 4; xvi. 21.) The priests were next employed "to shed the blood of the sacrifice:" which, being the life of every animal, was reserved to make atonement, and was therefore not allowed to be eaten, under the Old Testament dispensation (Gen. ix. 4; Lev. xvii. 11.) Afterwards, the body, or a part of it, as the fat, &c., were burned upon the altar with the fire which came immediately from heaven, both at the opening of the tabernacle worship, and afterwards at the consecration of Solomon's temple (Lev. ix. 24; 2 Chron. vii. 1—3.) Now, who can help perceiving that this fire represented the avenging justice of God (who is a consuming fire;) and that, when it consumed the harmless, unblemished sacrifice, whilst the guilty offerer escaped, it aptly prefigured the way of a sinner's salvation, through the expiatory sufferings of the spotless Lamb of God? The animal's violent death, by the shedding of its blood, denoted the offender's desert of temporal death; and the subsequent burning of its fat, or flesh, showed him to be exposed to future vengeance: but then, they represented the guilt and punishment, in both respects, as translated from him to the sacrifice, which bore them in his stead; and the whole ceremony, which concluded with the sprinkling of the blood, and in many cases its application to all those things that pertained to the worship of God, evidently typified the believer's deliverance from guilt and punishment, from the sting and dread of death, and finally from death itself, from sin, and all its consequences; the acceptance of his person and services, and his participation of eternal life and felicity, through "him who loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood," &c.

These appointments were varied, in divers particulars, as they respected the several kinds of sacrifices: but most of them coincided in the grand outlines here mentioned. The paschal lamb, the flesh of which was roasted and eaten, &c.; and the bodies of the sin offerings for the congregation, &c., which were burned without the camp, form the principal exceptions; but these variations serve to illustrate the several parts of that great subject which was exhibited by them. Even the thank-offerings and peace-offerings, though evidently typical of the believer's spiritual worship and communion with God, and with the saints, were all attended with the shedding and sprinkling of the blood, and the burning of the fat of the sacrifice on which they feasted. Nay, the very purifications with water (the emblem of sanc-

Digitized by Google

tification;) the re-admission of a leper into the congregation; the consecration of a priest; the performance of a Nazarite's vow, &c. were, in different ways, connected with the same observations. "Almost all things were purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there was no remission" (Heb. ix. 22.) So that this ran through the whole ritual law, and was interwoven with every part of the worship performed by the ancient church of God.

We need not be surprised, that they who overlook the typical import of the ritual law, or doubt of the atonement of Christ, should either consider these institutions as "an overgrown mass of trivial ceremonies;" or attempt to account for them from the policy of Moses; or trace them from the customs of the surrounding nations. But indeed the Israelites were expressly forbidden to imitate the Gentiles, and several institutions in the law were intended to keep them at a distance from their superstitions: and if any agreement be found in other respects, it is far more reasonable to suppose, that the Gentiles borrowed their usages from the Israelites, than that the Israelites were encouraged or required to copy the worship of idolaters; and the epistle to the Hebrews sufficiently proves to all who read it as the word of God, that these ceremonies were shadows or types of the redemption by Jesus Christ, in its several parts. Indeed some persons of great eminence in their line, would persuade us that the penmen of the New Testament accommodated their language on this subject to the usages of the Jews; and rather wrote agreeable to vulgar notions and prejudices, than according to the true nature of their subject. This must mean (if it mean any thing more, than at any rate to evade an argument which cannot be answered,) that the apostles were mistaken, or that they wilfully misled mankind: and we may safely infer from this method of reasoning on such a subject, that the divine inspiration of the New Testament in general, of the epistles in particular, and especially of that to the Hebrews, must be given up by all who persist in denying the real atonement of Christ, whenever this argument is used against them with energy, by some able and zealous controversialist; or at least, they must be forced to betake themselves to evasion, and other ingenious ways of losing sight of the precise point which is contested with them.

As every one of the grand divisions of holy Scripture carries along with it the evidence of its own divine original, so it may not be unseasonable to observe, that this is particularly the case with the books of Moses, which some have lately affected to speak of, as a respectable ancient composition, &c.; yet with very plain intimations that they are not to be regarded as of divine inspiration. But are not the prophecies contained in these books, fulfilling even to this day, in the state of the Jewish nation, and of the posterity of Ham? Did not our Lord quote them as the unerring word of God, and not merely as the words of Moses? (Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10; xxii. 31, 32; Luke xxiv. 27, 44). And can any man believe in Christ, who speaks of those books as a human composition which he quoted, and by quoting, authenticated as the oracles of God? But it is most to our present purpose to observe, that the astonishing coincidence between the types of the law, and the language used concerning Christ, by his apostles, &c., establishes the authority of the books of Moses along with that of the New Testament, so that they cannot be separated; as well as teaches us the real meaning of them. If attempts to lessen our regard to this part of Scripture be not the *covert* attacks of infidelity, most certainly they are calculated to subserve its cause.

"Known unto God are all his works from before the foundation of the world." What man of common sense, therefore, if not warped by prejudice, can suppose that the Lord, having appointed a number of ceremonies, without any reference to a future dispensation, and not suited to give mankind any just views of it, but the contrary, should afterwards so arrange that dispensation, or at least leave his servants so to speak of it, as to lead men to form notions more conformed to those antiquated rites, than to its real nature? Who can believe, that this new revelation should be made in such lan-

Digitized by Google

guage as must give believers erroneous views of it, unless they are extremely careful how they understand it; make large allowances for the prejudices of education, &c., in those who first propagated it; and employ much ingenious labour to discover the truth, by divesting it of the numerous metaphors under which it lies concealed or obscured? Surely, if we allow the Scriptures to be the word of the unerring, unchangeable, and all-wise God, we can scarce speak of such a method of interpretation, without failing of that reverence which we owe to his Divine Majesty. Does an architect, when about to erect a magnificent edifice, purposely arrange his plan to suit some inconvenient scaffolding which happens to be upon the spot, having been raised on another occasion? Or, if he build according to a scaffolding previously made by his directions, is he ever supposed to form the plan of his structure for the sake of the scaffolding? Or does any one doubt, that the scaffolding was raised to suit the plan that he had drawn for his intended building? And is it not almost infinitely more *rational* to suppose, that the Mosaic law was arranged, with a reference to the future revelation of the gospel; than to suppose, that the gospel was obscured, and even mis-stated, that it might be made apparently to accord to the abrogated ceremonies of the law?

But, though "without shedding of blood, there was no remission" of sins, under the old dispensation; yet "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin," (Heb. x. 4.) If the question should be proposed to a Socinian, why "this was not possible?" he might perhaps find it not very easy to give a direct and satisfactory answer. But if we allow (according to the idea of "no remission without shedding of blood,") that the necessity of an atonement, in order to forgiveness, originates from the infinite holiness and justice of God, and the intrinsic evil and desert of sin, and the consequent impossibility that he could pass by sin, without showing his abhorrence of it, and determination to punish it according to its demerit; we shall readily perceive, that nothing could render it consistent with the Divine glory to pardon and save sinners, which did not exhibit his justice and holiness in as clear a light, in shewing them mercy, as these attributes would have appeared in, had he executed the threatened vengeance. And if this were the case, however it might suit the designs of Infinite Wisdom, to appoint the sacrifices of lambs, bulls, goats, &c., as types and shadows, means of grace, or conditions of temporal remission; yet they could not possibly take away the guilt of sin; because they were not adequate exhibitions of the infinite justice and holiness of God. For what proportion could the death of an animal bear to the remission of that guilt, which merited the eternal punishment of an immortal soul? Or how could rational creatures behold, in such an observance, God's holy hatred of sin, and love of sinners? The same reasoning is conclusive, in respect of the vicarious sufferings of any mere man, or mere creature. Suppose it were right that one creature should bear the punishment merited by another; and any one could be found free from guilt, and willing to be substituted in the place of his guilty fellow-creature: yet he could only answer, one for one, body for body, life for life, soul for soul; his temporal sufferings could only answer to the temporal release of the condemned criminal; but could not be an adequate ransom for this immortal soul from future punishment; much less could it expiate the guilt of the unnumbered crimes of many millions. Should it be said, that this might be, if God had so appointed; I answer, that God appointed the sacrifice of bulls and goats; yet it was impossible that they should take away sin; and for the reason before assigned, it was impossible that God should appoint them, as more than a type of the real atonement. But no mere man can be found, who has not himself deserved the wrath of God; no one's body and soul are his own; no mere creature could be willing to bear the vengeance of heaven for another, if he might; and none might if he would: it may be our duty to lay down our lives for our brethren; but it cannot be allowable for us to choose to be

Digitized by Google

eternally unholy and miserable. The eternal Son of the Father, therefore, seeing that no other sacrifice could suffice, said, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God," &c. (Heb. x. 4—10.) I do not say, that the Lord could not have devised some other way of redemption; but we can conceive no other, by which perfect justice and purity could harmonize with boundless mercy; and as Infinite Wisdom gave this the preference, we are sure that it was in itself most eligible. The dignity of the Divine Redeemer, as One with the Father in the unity of the Godhead; his eternal relation to the Father, as the adequate object of his infinite love; his appointment to, and voluntary susception of his office; his incarnation and consequent relation to us in the human nature; the perfect purity of his manhood; the complete obedience of his whole life, amidst all kinds of difficulties and temptations; the tortures and ignominy of his death; the entire resignation and meekness with which he suffered; the principle from which his obedience and submission sprang; and the end to which the whole was directed; when they are duly considered and estimated, will combine to shew that he more honoured the law of God and its awful sanction by his righteousness and atonement, than if all men had either perfectly obeyed, or finally perished. When the Father was pleased thus to wound and bruise his well-beloved Son for the transgressions of his people, his judgment of the evil and desert of sin appeared most illustrious: when his love to sinners was shown to be inconceivably great, he would rather lay the load of their guilt and punishment on him in whom his soul delighted, than pardon them without testifying his abhorrence of their crimes. No encouragement could thus be given to others to venture on sin: no other sacrifice of this value and efficacy could be found: all must see, that punishment was not the arbitrary act of an inexorable Judge, but the unavoidable result of perfect holiness and justice, even in a Being of infinite mercy. Thus every mouth will at length be stopped, or filled with adoration; every heart impressed with awe and astonishment; every hope taken away from the impenitent and presumptuous; and the glory of God more fully manifested in all his harmonious perfections, than by all his other works, judgments, and dispensations. The story of Zaleucus, prince of the Locrians, is well known: to show his abhorrence of adultery, and his determination to execute the law he had enacted, condemning the adulterer to the loss of both his eyes, and at the same time to evince his love to his Son, who had committed that crime; he willingly submitted to lose one of his own eyes, and ordered one of his son's to be put out also. Now what adulterer could hope to escape, when power was vested in a man, whom neither self-love, nor natural affection in its greatest force could induce to dispense with the law, or relax the rigour of its sentence? Thus the language both of the Father and of the Son in this way of saving sinners manifestly is, "Let the law be magnified and made honourable," in the sight of the whole universe.

I would not embarrass these brief Essays by any thing superfluous or dubious: yet it seems to fall in with the design of them to observe, that the reward of righteousness is not annexed to a mere exemption from sin (for Adam on the day of his creation was free from sin); but to actual obedience during the appointed term of probation. So that the perfect righteousness of Christ was as necessary as the atonement of his death, to his mediatorial work on earth; not only as freedom from personal guilt was requisite in order to his bearing and expiating the sins of his people; but also as the meritorious purchase of their forfeited inheritance; that the second Adam's benefit might answer to the loss sustained through the first Adam. His was however a suffering obedience, and so expiatory; his death was the highest perfection of obedience, and so meritorious. We need not therefore very exactly distinguish between them; yet it is proper to maintain, that the believer is pardoned because his sin was imputed to Christ, and expiated by his sacrifice; and that he is justified and made an heir of heaven, because Christ "brought in an everlasting righteousness," "which is unto and upon

Digitized by Google

all them that believe, without any difference." Our Lord did not indeed bear all the misery to which the sinner is exposed: not being personally guilty, he could not endure the torments of an accusing conscience; knowing that he should triumph, and reign in glory, he could not feel the horrors of despair; and his infinite dignity rendering him able at once to make an all-sufficient atonement, it was not requisite that his sufferings should be eternal, as ours must otherwise have been. But he endured the scorn, rage, and cruelty of men, and all which they could inflict; the utmost malice of the powers of darkness; and the wrath and righteous vengeance of the Father; he bore shame, pain, and death in all its bitterness; and what he suffered in his soul during his agonies in the garden, and when he exclaimed on the cross, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" we cannot conceive; only we know that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him;" "the sword of vengeance awoke against him," and the "Father spared him not." We may therefore conclude, that he endured as much of that very misery which the wicked will endure from the wrath of God, and the malice of the infernal powers as could consist with perfect innocence, supreme love, and hope of speedy and final deliverance.

Many objections have been made to this doctrine of a real atonement, and a vicarious sacrifice for sin, as if it were irrational or unjust, or gave an unamiable view of the Divine character; or as if it were unfavourable to the cause of morality and virtue: and great pains have been taken to explain away the language of holy Scripture on this subject, as if it implied not any of those things which the unlearned reader is apt to infer from it. It cannot be expected, that I should give a particular answer to each of these objections which result rather from the state of men's hearts, than from any solid grounds of reasoning; but it may suffice to observe in general, that "God hath made foolish things the wisdom of this world;" that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him;" and especially, that "the preaching of the cross is foolishness," in the abstract, "to them that perish:" adverting to such testimonies of the Holy Spirit, we shall know what to think concerning those exclamations of *irrational* and *absurd*, which many of those who are wise in this world, and in their own eyes, employ in opposing the doctrine of the atonement. Nor can there be any injustice in this statement of it; for if one who was both *able* and *willing* to do it, was pleased to ransom his brethren from deserved eternal ruin, by enduring temporal sufferings and death as their Surety, what injustice could there be in accepting such a vicarious satisfaction for sin? And how can that doctrine give an unamiable view of the Deity, which shows him to be infinite in righteousness, holiness, love, mercy, faithfulness, and wisdom; and displays all these, and every other conceivable moral excellency, in full perfection and entire harmony? It can only appear so to sinners, because justice and holiness are not amiable in the eyes of the unjust and unholy. Or how can that doctrine be prejudicial to the cause of morality, which furnishes the most powerful motives and encouragements to holiness, and shows sin in all its horrid deformity, and with all its tremendous effects; and which has uniformly done more to "teach men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," than all other expedients besides have even appeared to do?

Let us then proceed to state a few select arguments, which demonstrate, that the doctrine, as it hath been explained and illustrated, is contained in the holy Scriptures.

I. The language used in them is decisive. It is not only said, that Jesus "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," (Gal. iii. 13); "that he suffered once *for sins*, the just for" (or instead of) "the unjust," (1 Pet. iii. 18); but that "he bare *our sins*, in his own body on the tree;" and "was made *sin* for us," (2 Cor. v. 20; 1 Pet. ii. 24). The prophet, speaking above seven hundred years before, "of the sufferings of

Digitized by Google

Christ, and the glory that should follow," (Isaiah liii); having observed, that "he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows," "was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities," shows the reason of this, by adding, that "the Lord *laid*, or *caused to meet*, upon him the *iniquity* of us all:" so that "it was exacted and he became answerable," according to the genuine meaning of the next words, (ver. 7). Thus he would "justify many, for he would *bear* their *iniquities*," and not merely the punishment due to them. We may in many cases say, that the innocent suffers for the guilty, when one is exposed to loss or pain by means of another's fault, or for his benefit; but can it be said with propriety, that the Lord lays upon the innocent sufferer the *iniquity* of the offender, or that the latter *bears* the *sins* of the former, when no translation or imputation of guilt is intended, and no real atonement made? If so, what words can convey the idea of imputation and atonement? What determinate meaning can there be in language? Or what doctrine can be deduced with certainty from the sacred oracles? The expressions *ransom, redemption, purchased, bought with a price, propitiation*, and several others, support this doctrine.

II. The testimony of John Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," (John i. 29), contains a very conclusive argument on this subject. Whatever other reasons may be thought of for a lamb being the selected emblem of the Lord Jesus, he could not *as a lamb* "take away sin," except "by the sacrifice of himself:" his teaching, rule, and example, have some effect, in different ways, in reforming mankind; and the influences of the Spirit sanctify the believer's heart: in these respects he may be said in some sense to take away sin; but *as a lamb*, he could only take away the guilt of it by giving himself to be slain, that he might "redeem us to God with his blood," being the antitype of the paschal lambs and daily sacrifices, even "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

III. When the apostle argues (1 Cor. xv. 17), that "if Christ were not risen, the Corinthians were yet in their sins," what could he mean, but that, as nothing could prove the reality and efficacy of Christ's atonement, except his resurrection; so nothing could take away their guilt but that atonement? For their reformation and conversion to the worship and service of the true God was a fact which could not be denied, whatever men thought of the doctrines in question.

IV. The same apostle says, that "Christ will appear the second time *without sin*," &c. (Heb. ix. 28). "But did he not appear the first time *without sin*? What then is the meaning of this opposition, that at his first coming he *bare our sins*, but at his second he shall appear *without sin*? The words can have no other imaginable sense, but that at his first coming he sustained the *person of a sinner*, and suffered *instead of us*; but at his second coming he shall appear, not as a sacrifice, but as a Judge." (Tillotson).

V. The apostolical method of exhorting men to holiness evinces the same point. They uniformly draw their arguments, motives, and encouragements from the cross of Christ; "His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree; that we being dead to sin, might live unto God:" "ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies and spirits, which are his," (see also 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Eph. v. 1, 2, 25, 26; Tit. ii. 11—14; 1 Pet. i. 13—20). This is the distinguishing peculiarity of their exhortations, in which they differ from all others who have attempted to excite men to virtue or morality.

VI. The appointment of the Lord's Supper, in remembrance of the body of Christ broken, and his blood poured out, and as a representation of the manner in which we become interested in the blessings of his salvation, even "by eating his flesh, and drinking his blood," (John vi. 48—58), is a conclusive argument on this subject; but it must be referred to a future Essay, when it will be fully discussed. At present I shall only call the reader's serious attention to the words of our Lord, when he instituted this ordinance:

Digitized by Google

"This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins."

Lastly, The songs of the redeemed in heaven, even of those who had come out of great tribulation, and shed their blood for Christ's sake, may well close these few brief but unanswerable arguments of this doctrine. Without one discordant voice, they ascribe their salvation to "the Lamb that was slain, who hath redeemed them to God with his blood;" "who hath washed them from their sins in his own blood," &c. But in what sense could the *Lamb* that was *slain* wash them from sin with his *blood*, unless he were truly and literally an atoning sacrifice for them? And this shows us, of what vast importance this doctrine is in the system of Christianity; and that it is indeed essential to it: for he who denies or overlooks it, cannot have the same judgment of the Divine character and law, or of sin, that others have; he cannot approach God in the same way, or with the same plea; he cannot exercise a repentance or faith of the same kind; he cannot feel himself under the same obligations, act from the same motives, pray, thank, and bless God for the same things, or have the same reasons for meekness, patience, gratitude, humility, &c. &c.; and finally, he cannot be fit for the same heaven, but would dislike the company, dissent from the worship, and disrelish the pleasures and employments of those, who ascribe all their salvation to God, and to the Lamb that was slain. And is not this sufficient to prove, that he cannot possess the faith, hope, love, and joy, which are peculiar to the religion of the crucified Emmanuel?

But it is also to be feared, that numbers assent to this most important doctrine, who neither understand its nature and tendency, nor are suitably influenced by it. The cross of Christ, when contemplated by an enlightened mind, most emphatically teaches the perfect glory and beauty of the Divine character; the obligations, reasonableness, and excellency of the moral law; the value of immortal souls, the vanity of earthly distinctions, the misery of the most prosperous transgressors, the malignity of sin, the lost estate of mankind, the presumption of every self-righteous hope; the inestimable value of that foundation which God hath laid; the encouragements given to sinners to return to, and trust in him, and their obligations to serve and obey him, as their reconciled Father and Friend. He therefore who truly believes this doctrine, and who glories in the cross of Christ alone, will habitually give the concerns of eternity a decided preference to every worldly object; he will have an earnest desire to promote the salvation of souls, especially the souls of those who are most dear to him; he will be crucified to the world and the world to him; he will repent of, hate, and forsake all his sins, and seek the crucifixion of every sinful passion; he will admit of no other hope of salvation, than that which rests on the mercy of the Father, through the atonement of the Son; he will deem it his privilege, honour, and pleasure to live to him, who died for him and rose again: the example and love of Christ will reconcile him to reproach, self-denial, and suffering for righteousness' sake, and dispose him to forgiveness, love of enemies, patience, &c., and whatever can adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Whilst we would therefore "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," we would also caution men not to "imprison the truth in unrighteousness." Not only are they enemies to the "cross of Christ," who vilify the doctrine of his atonement; but they also, who hold it in a carnal heart, and disgrace it by a worldly, sensual life, (Phil. iii. 18—21): and it is to be feared, that many who are zealous against the fatal Socinian heresy, are tainted with the abominable infection of Antinomianism; and that some others, who contend for the doctrine of the atonement, rest their hope upon their own works, and not on Christ. But as he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him "up for us all," will give the true believer all things with him; so he will not spare any of those who neglect, oppose, or abuse so great salvation.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY X.

On our Lord's Exaltation, and his Appearance "in the presence of God for us."

When our Saviour upon the cross was about to commend his spirit into the Father's hands, he said, "It is finished." Whatever the types had prefigured, or the prophets foretold, of his obedience, conflicts, and sufferings; whatever the glory of God, the honour of his law, or the rights and satisfaction of his justice required; and whatever was necessary in order to his final victory, triumph, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father in our behalf, was then fully accomplished; that is, as far as it could be, previous to his death, which immediately followed. He then became conqueror over the world, sin, and Satan, (triumphing over them even on the cross): and having consecrated the grave by his burial, to be a sacred repository for the bodies of his disciples, he arose on the third day, a mighty victor over the king of terrors himself, and at that crisis commenced the glory which was to follow his sufferings.

The evidences of his resurrection have been already considered, (Essay I. p. 165—167); the ends which were answered by that great event, may here be briefly mentioned. He thus confirmed, beyond all reasonable doubt, every part of the doctrine he had taught; proving especially, that he was the Son of God in that peculiar and appropriate sense, in which he had claimed that high relation to the Father, and for which he had been condemned as a blasphemer; he fully evinced, that his atonement had been accepted, and had effectually answered those great and gracious purposes for which it had been made: he was thus capable of possessing in our nature the mediatorial throne, which had been covenanted to him as the reward of his obedience and sufferings; and to appear as our Advocate and Intercessor in the presence of the Father; being our Brother, and glorifying in that condescending relation to us; and, finally, he was the first fruits of the general resurrection, the earnest and pledge of that grand and interesting event.

We need not here enlarge on the circumstances of our Lord's resurrection, or enter further upon the instructions that may be deduced from it: but as his mediation is naturally divided into two distinct parts, it regularly falls within our plan to consider at present, that part which he now performs in his heavenly glory; as we before did that which he fulfilled during his humiliation on earth. From the depth of his voluntary abasement, "he ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." He then "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them," (Psalm lxviii. 18; Eph. iv. 7—16.) "For the heavens must receive him, until the restitution of all things." "He is now gone to prepare a place for us; and he will come again, and receive us to himself, that where he is, there we," (who are his true disciples) "may be also," (John xiv. 2, 3; Acts iii. 21.) We will, therefore, in this Essay, point out the purposes for which Jesus, our forerunner, "hath for us entered into heaven," and the means by which he prepares the way for our admission to the same place of holy felicity.

The royal prophet (Psalm cx. 4.) introduces Jehovah declaring with an irreversible oath, that the Messiah was constituted a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec, (Gen. xiv. 18; Heb. vii;) and the apostle thence argues, that the Aaronic priesthood was never intended to be perpetual. Now Melchizedec's priesthood especially differed from that of Aaron, in that it united the regal power with the sacerdotal office; which showed, that the Messiah was to "be a priest upon a throne," (Zech. vi. 9—15.) But before we enter more particularly on the discussion of this important subject, I would observe, that it affords us a most conclusive proof of our Lord's

Digitized by Google

Deity. No mention is made by Moses of Melchizedec's "father, mother, pedigree, beginning of life, or end of days;" but he is introduced to our notice with mysterious abruptness, "being," says the apostle, "made like unto the Son of God," (Heb. vii. 3.) But in what sense could this render him "like to the Son of God," or a proper type of him, except as it was a shadow of his external pre-existence? As man, he had beginning of life, like "his brethren;" and if he, who tabernacled in our nature, had been a pre-existent creature of the highest order, he must nevertheless have had "beginning of life;" and the emphatic silence of Moses respecting the birth of Melchizedec could not have represented him, in any sense, as "like to the Son of God."

The High Priesthood of Christ, in the sanctuary above, first requires our consideration. On the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi.) the high priest (not arrayed in his robes of glory and beauty, but clad in linen garments like his brethren,) having offered the sin-offerings for himself and for the people, entered the holy of holies, with the sprinkling of blood, and the burning of incense by fire taken from the altar of burnt-offering; and thus as Israel's typical intercessor, he appeared before the mercy-seat, as in the presence of God for them. Thus from the holy nation a holy tribe was selected, from that tribe a holy family, and from that family a holy person (that is, typically, and by consecration:) yet even this individual, selected with such care and so many precautions from the whole human race, was not allowed, on pain of death, to enter within the veil, or to approach Jehovah, even on a mercy-seat, except on one day in a year; nor on that day without the previous offering of sacrifices, the blood of which he must sprinkle before the ark, whilst the smoke of the incense perfumed the holy place. The whole of this appointment was calculated to show in the most significant manner, to how great a distance from their offended Creator sin had removed fallen men; and how difficult it was to render their return and readmission to his favour consistent with the honour of his justice and holiness.

Thus our great High Priest, laying aside the robes of light and majesty, appeared in the mean attire of our nature; and was made in all things like unto his brethren, except as he was free from the least defilement of sin: and having on earth offered his one all-sufficient sacrifice, he ascended into heaven, to appear before the mercy-seat, in the true sanctuary, in the immediate presence of God, "for us;" bearing our nature, and pleading in our behalf the merits of his perfect obedience, and inestimable atonement; that we might be delivered from going down into the pit, through the ransom he hath paid for us, (Job. xxxiii. 24). The apostle writing to the Hebrews, discusses this subject very fully, and shows in how many and important particulars the antitype exceeded and consequently differed from the type. With lively and joyful gratitude he expiates on the compassion, faithfulness, and power of our great High Priest; on his divine dignity, and his condescension in assuming our nature, and owning us as his brethren; on his sympathy with us in our sorrows and temptations; on the prevalency of his intercession, and the unchangeable nature of that office, which he ever liveth to perform. He shows us, that, by the offering of his flesh, the way into the holiest is laid open, and that we may now draw near with boldness, through the rent veil, to the mercy-seat of our reconciled God: that, by the blood of the new covenant, the heavenly things themselves are purified, (that is, they are not polluted by the admission of sinners to them in this appointed way); and that "such an high priest became us," or suited our case, "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." In like manner, in another epistle, he principally grounds his defiance of all enemies on this doctrine, that Christ "died, yea, rather, is risen again, and is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," (Rom. viii. 33—39); and elsewhere he declares, that "by him both Jews and Gentiles have access by one Spirit unto the Father," (Eph. ii. 18). Even as John instructs us, that

Digitized by Google

"if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," &c. (1 John ii. 1, 2.) Many other testimonies to the same effect might be adduced, but these may suffice to our present purpose: except as we advert to our Lord's own words, when he declares, that "he is the door, and that whosoever enters in by him shall be saved;" that "he is the *way*, the truth, and the life, and that no man cometh to the Father but by him," (John x. 9; xiv. 6): and to his prayer in behalf of his disciples, just before his crucifixion, which may be considered as the specimen and substance of his intercession, (John xvii). From these Scriptures we learn, that sinners are not admitted in their own name, even to a mercy-seat to supplicate pardon, but in the name, and through the intercession of Christ; that their pleas must not be drawn from their own character, situation or services; nor even from the general goodness and compassion of God; but wholly from the person, work, and merits of Emmanuel; and that his pleas in their behalf are wholly deduced from what he hath done and suffered, in their nature and for their benefit.

It is not necessary for us to imagine any outward transaction, which accords to a high-priest burning incense, or to an advocate pleading a cause, &c. Heavenly things are represented to our minds under such emblems, to give us *true* ideas of their *nature*, not to convey to us *adequate* apprehensions of the *manner* of them. That Christ is represented as appearing in heaven as a lamb that had been slain, to instruct us in the reality and efficacy of his atonement: and his officiating as a priest, or pleading as an advocate, conveys similar instruction. Thence we may learn, that his interposition in our behalf, through the merits of his obedience unto death, renders our sinful persons and services accepted with the Father, and secures to us deliverance from every enemy and evil, the supply of every want, and the eternal enjoyment of all felicity. Farther than this we need not determine: he and the Father are one in essence, counsel, and will; and his mediation cannot but be effectual, in behalf of all who come to God through him. For it hath been repeatedly observed, (though opposers of these doctrines either *wilfully* or *carelessly* remain ignorant of it), that the atonement and intercession of Christ were not intended to *induce God to show mercy, but to render the exercise of his love to sinners consistent with the honour of his law, and the glory of his name:* for this single proposition, well understood, suffices to prove whole volumes that have been published on the subject, to be an empty contest with an imaginary opponent, and a triumph for an ideal victory. Whilst our Lord therefore directed his disciples to ask in his name, and promised that he would pray the Father for them, he also subjoins in another place, "I say not, that I will pray the Father for you," &c. (John xiv. 13—17; xvi. 26, 27): for his general plea in behalf of all "who come to God through him," suffices; nor is it necessary for the well-beloved Son of the Father to be particular, or to use importunity with him, to induce him to grant all covenanted blessings to his beloved children.

The intercession of Christ is totally distinct from the supplications which we make for one another. When we pray, according to our duty, for our brethren and fellow-sinners; our requests are only admissible and acceptable through his mediation. We do not come in our own name, or ground our intercession on our own services, or make any claim to the mercy we ask, or approach with an absolute certainty of succeeding. If our prayers for others be properly presented, they will be accepted; and if they be not granted, in the sense we meant them, they will return into our own bosom. But the intercession of Christ for his disciples is made in his own name, on the ground of his own merits and dignity, according to the covenant ratified with and by him, and with the absolute certainty of success. This shows the sin and idolatry of worshipping, or coming to God through other mediators: for either these were sinners that were brought to heaven through the merits and intercession of Christ, though they are thus addressed as his competitors: or they are created angels, not at all related to us, and utterly

Digitized by Google

destitute of every plea which they may urge in our behalf; having never been appointed to, and never having thought of intruding into that office. So that to worship saints and angels, even as intercessors, is an ascription to servants and creatures of that honour, which belongs to the only begotten Son alone; and they who thus dishonour the Son, do not honour the Father that sent him.

But though the intercession of Christ is presented in behalf of all "who come to God through him," or "who pray in his name:" and all men are invited to return in this way to the Lord from whom they have departed, and are assured that Christ will not refuse to maintain the cause of any man, whatever he hath been or is, who seeks the benefit of his advocacy: yet there is a sense in which it is not general, but particular. If he intercede for those who are now living without faith and prayer, or in the practice of sin; it will shortly appear by their repentance and conversion; for he never pleaded in behalf of those who continued to the last unbelieving and ungodly, (John xvii. 9—20). The intercession of Christ is therefore intended to give us "this confidence, that if we ask any thing according to the will of God, he heareth us," (1 John v. 14, 15): but it can form no just ground of encouragement to those who do not pray at all; who come not before God in the name of Jesus, but with other pleas; who ask such things as God hath not promised, or whose prayers are mere lip-labour and hypocrisy.

We are then instructed to come to the Father, through the mediation of the Son, for the forgiveness of our sins, the acceptance of our persons and services, and all things immediately connected with eternal salvation, and for all temporal benefits, as far as Infinite Wisdom sees them conducive to our real good. But especially we are encouraged in his name to pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate, renew, purify, comfort, and strengthen our souls; to furnish us with that measure of spiritual gifts which our situations require; and support us under the trials to which we may be exposed. We also expect, that through this heavenly advocate, our prayers for our friends or enemies, our brethren, or the church at large, will be accepted and answered in the most desirable manner, notwithstanding our unworthiness, and the imperfection of our duties; that our praises and thanksgivings will ascend as a sacrifice well pleasing to God; and that our feeble endeavours to serve and honour him, though in strict justice they merit condemnation, will receive a large and gracious reward.

But our exalted Redeemer not only appears in the presence of God for us as a merciful High Priest, but also as a glorious King, for he is a priest after the order of Melchizedec, a king of peace, and of righteousness. As a king, he confers blessings and affords protection; he enacts laws, demands obedience, obtains victories, and exercises authority, and he will at length administer justice to the rational creation. "All power," says he, "is given unto me, in heaven and in earth," (Matt. xxviii. 18.) The angels that excel in strength are "his mighty angels." "He is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, angels, authorities, and powers being made subject to him," (1 Pet. iii. 22.) "God hath set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," (Eph. i. 20—23; Phil. xi. 9—11.) "He hath also committed all judgment unto him, that all men might honour him, even as they honour the Father," (John v. 21—27; Rom. xiv. 10—12; 2 Thess. i. 7—10.) The expressions *given* and *committed*, &c., evidently relate to him as Man and Mediator, and in no respect deduct from the energy of this language of the Holy Spirit: but who must He be *originally*, who can *receive in his delegated character* such authority, and exercise such powers? What creature could sustain the weight of that dominion which rests on the shoulders of him, who was a "child born, and a son given unto us?" (Isaiah ix. 6, 7.) No doubt he, of

Digitized by Google

whom such things are spoken, is the mighty God, the Lord from heaven, God manifest in the flesh! That one who is truly man, should exercise absolute authority over all angels, who serve him as ministering spirits to his redeemed people; that he should have the keys of death and the unseen world, (Rev. i. 18;) and that the universal kingdom of nature and providence should be administered by him, is a most surprising mystery; but that all this should subserve the good of such worthless creatures as we are, is most stupendous and inconceivable love! And they must have very high thoughts of human nature, or very low apprehensions of the infinite God, who can suppose a mere man to be capable of such pre-eminent dignity and authority.

Yet he who is our Brother and Friend, thus rules all worlds with absolute sway, is King of kings, and Lord of lords; the rise, fall, and revolutions of empires are ordered by him; he hath all hearts in his hand, and turneth them as he pleaseth. The Father "hath set his king upon his holy hill of Zion," in defiance and contempt of the opposition of all those that say, "let us break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords from us:" and "with his iron rod he will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth; kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish," (Psalm ii.) The duration, prosperity, and termination of every man's life are appointed by him; and the doom of every soul. Storms and tempests, pestilences and earthquakes, are his servants; all nature obeys his word of judgment or of mercy. Tyrants and persecutors accomplish his secret purposes, "howbeit they mean not so:" nor can deceivers, by their unwearied efforts, exceed the limits assigned them. Even apostate spirits know his power, and reluctantly obey his mandate: when he was "in the form of a servant," a legion of them could not so much as possess a herd of swine, without his permission; nor can any of them defeat his counsels, escape his detection, or avert his omnipotent vengeance. "His riches are unsearchable: in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" "all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily;" yea the fulness of the Spirit of wisdom, truth, power, and holiness; and "from his fulness do all his people receive," (Isaiah xi. 2—5; John i. 16; iii. 34; Col. ii. 3—9.) So that he governs all events in that manner, which may best promote the safety and happiness of his church, and of true believers. "All things," therefore, "work together for good to them;" "none can pluck any of them out of his hands," (John x. 27—30,) "no weapon formed against them shall prosper: nothing shall separate them from the love of God:" Jehovah is their "shepherd, they shall not want:" tribulations, temptations, persecutions, conflicts, yea, death itself, are instruments in the hands of Christ, to prepare them for "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And "in all things they will be made more than conquerors," until they be enriched with everlasting felicity. But this power is equally formidable to obstinate unbelievers: all who will not have Christ to reign over them, will be destroyed as his enemies; no refuge can be found from his intolerable indignation, no resistance made to his omnipotent word. This kingdom shall endure through all ages, to the end; then his power will raise the dead; he will judge "the world in righteousness," and decide the eternal state of all mankind: and thus the design of his delegated authority being completely answered, he will, as Mediator, deliver up "the kingdom to God, even the Father;" the *absolute* dominion of the Creator will be re-established; and "God will be all in all."

It scarce need be observed, that the authority, protection and munificence of our glorious King, demand of us implicit and unreserved obedience. The faith that welcomes his salvation, worketh by love and ensures a cheerful attention to his commands: all the precepts of Scripture either are the mandates of Christ our King, to all that share the blessings of his peaceful rule; or they constitute that law which is the ministration of death and condemnation. Though his commands coincide with the moral law, yet they are

Digitized by Google

modified differently, as addressed to sinners who seek salvation by him. The commands to repent, to believe, to pray, to observe his ordinances, to love the brethren, &c., are indeed contained in the comprehensive requirement of supreme love to God, and equal love to our neighbour: yet they are only given to sinners through Christ and the gospel; and they alone are his true subjects who submit to his authority, and from evangelical principles, uprightly endeavour to obey his commandments, (Mat. vii. 21—28; John xiv. 21—23; xv. 14.)

But we must also consider the ascended Redeemer as the great Prophet of his church. He indeed *personally* performed the prophetical office on earth, during his humiliation: but as all the ancient prophets were his servants and representatives; so the apostles, evangelists, and penmen of the New Testament were his delegates; and so are all those who preach according to the holy Scriptures. Christ is the great teacher of mankind; the whole revelation of God is imparted to him: he is the Word and Wisdom of the Father, and the Light of the world; all who follow him have the light of life, all others abide in darkness! Divine truth is reposited in him as in a storehouse for our benefit; thence it is communicated to us through the Scriptures: the Holy Spirit was sent forth from him to inspire prophets, apostles, and evangelists: and he still furnishes pastors and teachers for their work (for these are the gifts of the ascended Redeemer to rebellious man; (Eph. iv. 8—16.) Moreover, the same Spirit prepares men's minds to receive the truth in faith and love, and to understand its nature, glory, and tendency; thus he gives efficacy to the word and applies his salvation to our souls, (John xvi. 14, 15.) So that the Lord Jesus, as ascended on high, is the sole Prophet of the church, and teaches his people by his word, by faithful ministers, and by his Holy Spirit. They, therefore, who seek from him the knowledge of God and of his truth and will, with a humble, teachable, believing, and obedient disposition, in the use of his appointed means, will be made wise to salvation; preserved (in proportion to the simplicity of their dependence) from errors and delusions; guided in the midst of the paths of judgment; and instructed how to act as circumstances may require, with discretion and propriety: but the self-wise of every description, and all who refuse to receive instruction from Christ, will be entangled in error, and given over to strong delusion, whatever their talents, opportunities, attainments, reputation, or assiduity may be, (Mat. xiii. 11—15.) And even believers will be left to fall into distressing mistakes, if at any time they lean to their own understanding, neglect to seek wisdom from this great counsellor, or prefer the opinion of some favourite teacher to the word of him who is the Truth itself.

But these distinct offices of our glorified Lord cannot be separated, either in respect of his performance of them, or of our dependence on him. The self-righteous and the self-wise may seem willing to own him as their king; whilst the one rejects him as a prophet, and both of them refuse to come to God through him as their high-priest: on the other hand, the Antinomian may seem to rely on him as a priest, whilst he determines that "he will not have him to reign over him." These and similar dependences are mere delusions: for Christ rules as a priest on his throne; he intercedes with regal authority; and he teaches his disciples to rely on his atonement and advocacy, to shelter their souls under his omnipotent protection, and to submit to his sovereign authority. He reveals as a prophet, what he purchased and obtains as a high priest and confers as a munificent prince. The obedience which he requires of his subjects, he by his grace disposes and enables them to perform, and renders it accepted through his intercession. So that they who truly receive him in one of these combined offices, receive him in them all.

Thus our Lord prepares their souls for the inheritance which he hath purchased for them: nor could the utmost efficacy of one of these distinct parts of his mediatorial undertaking, accomplish that gracious purpose. His sacri-

Digitized by Google

fice and intercession, indeed, render it consistent with the glory of God to admit us sinners into his presence, to receive us to his favour, to make us his children, and to give us an inheritance in his own holy habitation; but how should we profit by this provision, did he not send forth his word and his ministers to proclaim the glad tidings, to give the invitations, and to set before us his precious promises and new covenant engagements? How can we receive the advantage even of this revelation without we understand and believe it? or how shall we credit such a humbling spiritual message, except the eyes of our minds be opened by the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor. ii. 14.) And, at last, how could we unholy creatures be made meet for this holy inheritance, without the influences of his new-creating Spirit? How could we overcome the powers of darkness and all our enemies, if he did not fight for us? How could we meet the king of terrors, if he did not engage to support and deliver us; and finally to raise our bodies incorruptible, immortal, and glorious, to unite with our souls in the everlasting enjoyment of the love of our reconciled God and Father. Is this then our creed, our experience and dependence? Do we thus rely on Christ our Prophet, Priest, and King? and do we, in the patient obedience of faith and love, "wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life?" (Jude 20, 21.) For this, and this only, is genuine Christianity.

ESSAY XI.

On Justification.

All things having been made ready for the salvation of sinners, in the person and mediation of the great Redeemer; it was also necessary that the method or *medium* of appropriating this inestimable benefit, should be clearly and expressly revealed; and this leads us to the consideration of the Scripture doctrine of justification. I shall therefore in the present Essay, briefly explain the meaning of the words *justify* and *justification*, as they are used by the sacred writers;—show that we must be justified before God by faith alone;—consider the peculiar nature of faith, and the manner in which it justifies;—assign a few reasons why justification and salvation are ascribed to this, rather than any other holy dispositions or actions of the soul;—and answer some of the more plausible objections to the doctrine.

The terms *justify* and *justification* are taken from the common concerns of life, and applied, with some necessary variation of meaning, to the state of sinners who have found acceptance with God; and they imply, that the sinner is now dealt with as if he were a righteous person, and therefore he is wholly exempted from those sufferings which are strictly speaking *penal*, and is entitled to the reward of perfect obedience; though in himself he hath merited no such a reward, but on the contrary hath deserved the punishment denounced in the law against transgressors. These are commonly said to be *forensic* terms, referring to the practice of human judicatories; and they seem to have been originally taken from such transactions; yet this derivation gives us a very inadequate idea of their import. For when a man is charged with a crime before an earthly tribunal, he must either be condemned or acquitted: if he be condemned, he may be *pardoned*, but he cannot be *justified*; if he be acquitted, he may be *justified*, but he cannot stand in need of a *pardon*. Moreover, a criminal may be acquitted for want of legal evidence, or from other causes, when there can be no reasonable doubt of his guilt: yet no accusation for the same crime can be brought against him, though he is very far from being fully justified from it, or admitted to the full enjoyment of those privileges that belong to an unsuspected member of civil society: nor would he be a proper person to be confided in, or ad-

Digitized by Google

vanced to a place of honour and responsibility. Whereas, if an accused person be fully justified from the charge brought against him, he suffers no degradation in his character, or disadvantage in his circumstances; his integrity is often placed in a more conspicuous light than before; he is considered as an injured man; and is frequently recommended by these circumstances to the favour and confidence of the prince, or of the people. Justification, therefore, in the original meaning of the word, is not only distinct from pardon, but is absolutely incompatible with it: it implies far more than the acquittal of an accused person: it is a declaration that no charge ought to have been made against the man; that he is justly entitled to all the privileges of a good citizen; and that he is, and ought to be, admissible to every post of honour and emolument, even as if he had never been accused. The meaning of the word, in other concerns of life, is the same: if a man's character has been aspersed, he is said to be completely justified, when the charge is entirely refuted and proved malicious or groundless, to the satisfaction of all that inquire into it.

But, on the other hand, our justification before God always connects with pardon, and implies that we are guilty, and we are justified as ungodly; "righteousness being *imputed* to us without works," (Rom. iv. 1—8). If we had never sinned, we might have been *justified* before God by our own obedience, according to the common use of the word justification: no charge could have been brought or proved against us, nor should we have needed any forgiveness. But by breaking the holy law of God, we have forfeited our title to the reward of righteousness, according to the law; and have incurred the penalty of eternal misery. *The justification*, therefore, *of a sinner*, must imply something distinct from a total and final remission of the deserved punishment, namely, a renewed title to the reward of righteousness, as complete and effective as he would have had if he had never sinned, but had perfectly performed, during the term of his probation, all the demands of the Divine law. The remission of sins alone would place him in such a state, that no charge would lie against him: but then he would have no title to the reward of righteousness till he had obtained it by performing, for the appointed time, the whole obedience required of him; for he would merely be put again into a state of probation, and his justification or condemnation would not be decided till that were terminated: but the justification of the pardoned sinner gives him a *present* title to the reward of righteousness, independent of his *future* conduct, as well as without respect to his *past* actions. This is manifestly the Scripture idea of justification: it is uniformly represented as immediate and complete, when the sinner believes in the Lord Jesus Christ; and not as a contingent advantage, to be waited for till death or judgment: and the arguments that some learned men have adduced to prove that justification means nothing else than forgiveness of sins, only show, that the two distinct blessings are never separately conferred. David, for instance, says, "blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity," (Psalm xxxii. 2); and Paul observes, that "David describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works," (Rom. iv. 6): now this does not prove, that "not imputing sin," and "imputing righteousness," are synonymous terms; but merely that where God does not impute sin, he does impute righteousness, and confers the title to eternal life, on all those whom he rescues from eternal death, (Acts xiii. 38, 39). Indeed, exemption from a terrible punishment, and a right to an actual and vast reward, are such distinct things, that one cannot but wonder they should be so generally confounded as they are in theological discussions. It may therefore suffice to observe, that justification signifies in Scripture, that God hath given a sinner a right and title to eternal life, accounting him righteous by an act of sovereign grace, so that thenceforth there is no condemnation for him; but being thus justified, "he is made an heir, according to the hope of eternal life," (Tit. iii. 1—7).

Every attentive reader of the Scriptures, (especially of the writings which

Digitized by Google

tne apostles penned by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the last and fullest revelation of the truth of God to mankind) must observe that they constantly declare, that a man is "justified by faith only, and not by the works of the law." Many have endeavoured to explain all such testimonies to mean the Mosaic law, as distinguished from the Christian dispensation, and to confine them principally to the abrogated ceremonies. But "is the knowledge of sin," by the ceremonial, or by the moral "law?" Was the ceremonial law "the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones?" Did the apostle know this law to be "spiritual, holy, just, and good?" Did "he delight in it, after the inner man?" Did the Mosaic rites, or the tenth commandment, convince him, "that concupiscence was a sin," and to slay his hope of justification by the law? (Rom. vii.) "Did Christ redeem us from the curse of the ceremonial law alone, by being made a curse for us?" (Gal. iii. 13). Such questions might easily be multiplied, and each of them formed into a regular argument, demonstrating the falsehood and absurdity of this opinion; but the compass of this Essay does not admit of it, nor is it necessary in so plain a case. No law in the universe can both justify and condemn the same person: if then no man hath always loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, no man can be justified according to the works of the moral law, because all are exposed to condemnation for breaking it: if no human action be more excellent than the law requires our whole conduct to be, then none of our works of righteousness can do any thing to reverse the condemnation that our sins have incurred: and if the best of our good works come short of perfection, and our best days are chequered with many sins; then we must continue to accumulate guilt and condemnation, so long as we remain under, and are judged according to the law. So that by no works of any law whatsoever can any transgressor of *that law* be justified in the sight of God. On the contrary, it is constantly declared, that a man must be justified *by faith*, and through faith alone, (Rom. iii. 28—31); that "to him who worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," (Rom iv. 5); and that "God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus," (Rom. iii. 26). This way of justification is constantly and carefully distinguished from that by works; nay, opposed to, as incompatible with it: "it must be by faith, that it might be by grace: because the law worketh wrath: and if by grace, then it is no more of works," &c. (Rom. iv. 14—16; xi. 6.) And even James, who, in *another sense*, shows that "a man must be justified by works, and not by faith only," illustrates his doctrine by the example of Abraham, "who was justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar:" and then adds, "seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and *it was imputed to him for righteousness*," (Jam. ii. 20—26): now this was spoken many years before Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac, yea before Isaac was born, (Gen. xv. 6). It is therefore evident, that James only meant that the believer proves his profession to be sincere and his faith living, by the fruits of holy obedience; and is thus justified before men on earth, and will be justified before the world at the last day, from that charge of hypocrisy which will be substantiated against all those, who "say they have faith, and have not works." Otherwise, we should find as much difficulty in reconciling James to himself, as some have done in reconciling Paul to him: for he adduces the same example, and quotes the same Scripture in illustration of this point, that Paul did; and supposed that he had confirmed the true doctrine of justification by faith, by distinguishing living from dead faith, and by showing, that no faith could justify a man *before God*, which did not prove itself genuine, and justify the possessor *before his neighbours*, by influencing him to the practice of good works, according to the opportunity afforded him.

But the general doctrine, that "a man must be justified in the sight of

Digitized by Google

God by faith alone," is too plain to need much proof. They who regard the Epistles of St Paul, must know that he not only asserts, but confirms this doctrine by various arguments, illustrations, and examples; that he declares it impossible for a man to be justified in any other way; that all the Old Testament saints were justified by their faith; that "they who seek righteousness, *as it were*, by the works of the law," stumble and fall, (Rom. ix. 30—33; x. 3—11;) and have no benefit from Christ and the gospel, (Gal. v. 2—6;) but remain under the curse; and that "if any man, or angel, should preach any other doctrine, he would be accursed." Indeed those Scriptures which do not immediately relate to justification, continually speak of faith as the grand distinguishing difference, between those that are saved and them that perish. The texts in which propositions to this effect are contained, are more numerous than can easily be conceived by persons who have not particularly examined the subject: as may easily be seen by looking over the articles of *faith*, *believing*, &c., in a good concordance. *By faith* we pass from death unto life; *by faith* we are saved, we walk, we stand, we work, we fight and conquer: we come unto God, we receive the Spirit, and we are sanctified *by faith*; and every thing pertaining to our peace, stability, fruitfulness, comfort, and eternal felicity, are evidently suspended on, and inseparably connected with our faith in a peculiar manner, and wholly different from the relation which they bear to any other holy disposition or act of obedience, that we possess or perform. So that it is really surprising that any, except avowed infidels or sceptics, should deny the doctrine of justification by faith only, whatever method they adopt of explaining the meaning of the words *faith* and *justification*.

I shall, therefore, next proceed to consider the distinguishing nature and effects of faith, and the manner in which it justifies. Some opposers of this fundamental doctrine attempt to explain it away, by representing faith as a compendious term, denoting the whole of that profession and obedience which Christ requires of his disciples: so that they suppose we are justified by embracing and obeying the gospel, as a mitigated law of works; and that Christ purchased for us the acceptance of sincere, instead of perfect obedience. Their definition of faith comprises in it repentance, love, obedience, &c: and it seems that on this plan it would, at least, be equally proper to say, that we are justified by our love and its fruits, as by our faith, if any distinction were admitted: but how different this is to the language of the sacred oracles need not be said; and surely in this case we should be justified by "works of righteousness that we had done," though not by the works of the law. Neither hath it ever been shown in what part of the New Testament this mitigated law may be found: and surely nothing like it is contained in our Lord's sermon on the mount, or in the preceptive part of the apostolical epistles: nor are we told precisely what it requires, or what exact measure of obedience will justify a man according to it. On this plan, it is not easy to understand how Christ "magnified the law, and made it honourable:" "how the law is established by faith:" for which of our sins the death of Christ atoned (seeing the law is repealed, and a milder law given, by obedience to which we are justified:) or how boasting can thus be excluded. In fact, this sentiment totally makes void the holy, just, and good law of God; and alters the standard of our duty, from the exact requirements of the holy precept, to a vague, indeterminate idea called *sincere obedience*; which may be modelled and varied, according to the reasonings and inclinations of mankind: and thus it virtually sets aside both the law and the gospel. But as faith in respect of justification is not only opposed to the works of the law, but distinguished from repentance, hope, charity, &c. as required of, and exercised by believers; and as none of these, nor any kind or degree of obedience is ever said to justify a man in the sight of God; so we are warranted to decide without hesitation, that the apostles never meant by faith such a compound of all the distinct parts of Christianity; and that such a supposition would imply, that they used the most unsuitable

Digitized by Google

and obscure expressions that could possibly be devised. We allow indeed, that true faith inseparably connects with, or produces all the other essential parts of Christianity: and in like manner, in a complete human body, there are ears, hands, feet, &c., as well as eyes; yet the eyes alone can perform the function of seeing: and thus the tree produces the fruit, yet is distinct from it; and the stem or branches of the tree may answer purposes for which the fruit, though valuable, is totally unfit. It is, therefore, a very different thing to say, that living faith is *connected* with repentance, *works* by love and *produces* obedience; than to contend that it *includes* them, and that we are justified by repentance, love, and obedience as parts of our faith.

Others again suppose, that faith is nothing more than an assent to the truth of Christianity: and that a Jew or Christian, on embracing and professing the gospel, was freed from the guilt of his former sins; that being thus brought into a justified state, he would continue in it or fall from it, according to his subsequent behaviour: and that his justification at the last day must be by his own works, if he escape final condemnation. But here again we inquire, how this system can consist with the very meaning of the word *justify*, or *account righteous*, when the sinner is merely put upon a new probation, to work out a righteousness for himself? How it consists with believers "not coming into condemnation," and "having eternal life abiding in them?" How it excludes boasting? And where it is found in the sacred oracles? In fact, the dead faith exploded by James, is thus brought forward for the sinner's first justification; whilst the dead works of a mere formalist are generally meant by the obedience which is at last to justify such a believer: so that the sentiment verges on the one hand to an antinomian abuse of the gospel, and on the other to a pharisaical opposition to it.

But what then is faith? To answer this question, I would observe, that *faith*, or *believing*, in common language, implies credit given to a report, testimony, or promise, or confidence placed in any person; and almost all the affairs of life are conducted on this principle, that men in ordinary circumstances are entitled to a measure of credit and confidence. But "if the testimony of man be great, the testimony of God is greater;" yea, "it is sure, and giveth wisdom to the simple." Divine faith is, therefore, *a disposition readily to believe the testimony and to rely on the promises of God.* The apostle Paul briefly calls it "the belief of the truth." (2 Thess. ii. 12, 13;) of every revealed truth, and especially of "the word of the truth of the gospel;" and he defines "faith to be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," (Heb. xi. 1.) In general it gives implicit credit to the Divine veracity, in respect of all the invisible things that God hath attested; some of which are past, as the creation, the fall of man, the deluge, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, &c.; others exist at present, as the all-pervading Providence and all-seeing eye of God, the intercession of Christ in heaven, &c.; and others are future, as the coming of Christ to raise the dead and judge the world, and the state of eternal retributions: but faith credits all of them, and so receives the testimony of God, both respecting the evil and the good, that it realizes them to the mind, as if they were indeed perceivable by the bodily senses. But in its more particular exercise, it especially regards, embraces, realizes, and looks for the future blessings which God hath promised; and thus gives the soul, as it were, a present possession of things hoped for. The examples recorded in the last mentioned chapter, evince that this faith always receives the Divine testimony, not only as *true*, but as *interesting* in the highest degree; and thus as a living principle it influences a man to flee from, or provide against the threatened evil, and to pursue with earnestness and decision the promised good. But the record which God hath given us of his Son and of eternal life in him, is the centre of revelation; faith therefore always pays a peculiar regard to it, and thus especially "sets to its seal that God is true," (John iii. 14—21, 33—36; 1 John v. 10—13:) whilst unbelief makes him a liar. Other divine testimonies having shown a man that he is a lost sinner deserving of, and ex-

Digitized by Google

posed to the wrath of God, these discover to him his only refuge. The Holy Spirit through the "belief of the truth," has "convinced him of sin;" and now "he glorifies Christ," and shews to his enlightened mind the nature, suitableness, and value of his salvation, as revealed in the word of the gospel. The Father, as it were, says to him, "This is my beloved Son,—hear him:" and his heart answers, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." He credits the testimony of God concerning the Person and Mediation of Emmanuel; he feels his need of the teaching of such a Prophet; the deliverance and protection of such a King, and the blessings of his kingdom; and above all, of the sacrifice, merits, and intercession of this great High-Priest. Faith in the Divine testimony and promises influences him to entrust his soul and all his eternal interests into the hands of Christ, relying on his power, truth, and love: he comes to the Father through him and in his name; he shelters his soul from the wrath of God and the curse of the law, under the protection of his atoning blood; and confides in his power and grace to deliver him from all his outward and inward foes; he sits at the Redeemer's feet, hears and observes his directions, lives by faith in him for every thing; and this faith working by love, and learning daily lessons from his word, and from the cross, gives him the victory over the fear of man and the love of the world, increases his hatred of and humiliation for sin, and furnishes him with motives, encouragements, and aids for all holy obedience.

But whatever faith may effect as the active principle of a man's conduct, it justifies him before God only as it unites him to Christ, and interests him in his righteousness and atonement, and in the promises of God in him. The other operations and effects of this precious faith serve to distinguish it from a worthless, dead faith; but do not at all concur in our justification by it: for we are justified as one with Christ, on which account it is meet that we should share his purchased blessings; whilst he that hath not faith stands in no such relation to him, and is not entitled to such distinguished advantages. But then all who have this faith do repent, do love the Lord and his people, and uprightly obey his commands; by which they are distinguished from *mere professors*.

We must not then suppose that we are justified by the *merit* of our faith, any more than by our good works: for though true faith is pleasing to God, because honourable to his name, yet it cannot atone for our sins, or purchase heaven; nay the imperfection of our faith would condemn us, if we were to be judged according to the merit of it. But "we are justified by faith alone," because by it we receive and become interested in "that righteousness of God which is upon all, and unto all that believe," (Rom. iii. 21—28): and this righteousness being the perfect obedience unto death of God incarnate, and so of infinite value, and having been devised, appointed, wrought out, and revealed for this very purpose, is fully sufficient to justify all who are interested in it, how numerous soever they are, or how vile soever they have been. We are therefore said "to be justified freely by the grace of God," to "be justified by the blood of Christ," (for by shedding his blood he finished his obedience as our surety); to have "righteousness imputed to us without works," and to be "made the righteousness of God in Christ," (Rom. iv, v; 2 Cor. v. 21). Even as Paul counted all but loss, that he might win Christ, and be found in him—having the "righteousness of God by faith," (Phil. iii. 3—9). We are also justified as *ungodly* persons: for though true faith is the effect of regeneration, and the beginning of godliness, yet the man *in himself, according to the law*, is liable to condemnation as ungodly, and is only justified, as viewed *in Christ*, according to the gospel. Hence it appears, that the grace (that is, the gratuitous favour, sovereign love, or everlasting mercy of God) is the source of our justification; the righteousness and atonement of Emmanuel are the meritorious cause of it; and faith is the only recipient of the blessing: therefore justification may be ascribed either to the source, the meritorious cause, or to the recipient of it; even as a drowning person may be said to be saved, either by the man on the bank

Digitized by Google

of the river, or by the rope cast out to him, or by his hand apprehending the rope; according to the different ways in which we speak on the subject. The manner in which faith justifies may be illustrated by considering in what sense a bank-note pays a demand made on any one: the intrinsic value of the paper is not one farthing, but it refers the creditor to a company who are engaged, and competent to answer the demand, and therefore it is accounted to the debtor as so much paid in specie. Thus faith refers God the Father to Christ, who is able and willing to answer for every believer, and therefore "it is imputed to us for righteousness:" so that if a man should die, immediately after the first exercise of true faith, (as the thief on the cross did), and before he had time to perform one further act of obedience, he would certainly enter heaven as a justified person; though all who are spared, will as certainly show their faith by their works. Nor can there be any doubt, but that the justifying faith of Abraham, &c., had a similar respect to the promises and testimony of God concerning a Redeemer that was to come, and justified him in exactly the same manner.

The Scriptures inform us, that "the only wise God our Saviour," hath appointed this method of justification, that the benefit might be of grace; for faith, of that nature which hath been described, expressly renounces all claim in the way of merit; it allows, "that by the works of the law no flesh can be justified in the sight of God;" it comes to him, not to buy, earn, or demand a recompense, but to crave mercy, the gift of righteousness, and the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, and in that way, by which the desert of sin and the justice of God were most clearly displayed to the universe. So that in this way "of justifying the ungodly" by faith alone, the whole glory is secured to the Lord; and his justice, holiness, truth, and wisdom, as well as his abounding grace, are explicitly acknowledged and honoured: and as faith itself is the gift of God, whilst the weakest faith justifies as certainly as the strongest, (though it does not bring such evidence of it to the conscience); so boasting is excluded, every ground of self-preference is thus removed, and a foundation is as it were laid in the believer's heart, for the constant exercise of humility, dependence, patience, and meekness, and that love which constrains the redeemed sinner "to live no longer to himself, but to him that died for him and rose again."

But it may be objected, that the Scriptures speak of repentance, conversion, love, obedience, doing the will of God, and forgiveness of enemies, &c. as requisite in order to our acceptance and admission to the enjoyment of our heavenly inheritance; and how can this consist with the doctrine of justification by faith alone? No doubt these things are necessary; nay, there is no salvation without them, according to the time afforded, nor does any man come short of salvation in whom they are found. *They are things which accompany salvation:* they either prepare the heart for receiving Christ by faith, or they are effects of, and evidences that he is thus received: yet Christ himself is our whole salvation, and faith alone receives him, and appropriates the blessing—not *by believing without evidence that Christ is ours, but by applying to him, according to the word of God, that he may be ours.* Should it be further objected, that the decision of the day of judgment is always stated to be made "according to men's works;" it may suffice to answer in this place, that no faith justifies except that which works by love; that love uniformly produces obedience; and that the works thus wrought will certainly be adduced as evidences in court, to distinguish between the true believer and all other persons. Finally, the objection that this doctrine tends to licentiousness, seems to have been already sufficiently answered by the explanation given of the nature and effects of saving faith: and I shall merely add a most earnest exhortation to all who hold this doctrine, to walk so circumspectly, "that whereas many speak evil of them, as evil-doers, they may be confuted and ashamed, who falsely accuse their good conversation in Christ, (1 Pet. ii. 12; iii. 16).

Thus, having explained the doctrine of justification by faith alone,

Digitized by Google

" through the righteousness of God, even of our Saviour Jesus Christ," (2 Pet. i. 1); and proved it to be that of the holy Scriptures; I would conclude by reminding the reader of its vast importance. " How shall man be just with God?"—All our eternal interests depend on the answer, which, in our creed and experience, we return to this question: for if God hath, for the glory of his own name, law, and government, appointed such a method of justifying sinners, as that revealed in the gospel; and they, in the pride of their hearts, refuse to seek the blessing in this way, but will come for it according to their own devices, he may justly, and will certainly, leave them under merited condemnation, (Rom. x. 1—4). May God incline every reader to give this subject a serious consideration with the day of judgment, and eternity before his eyes! Nor let it be forgotten, that all the reformers from popery, (who were eminent men, however some may affect to despise them) deemed this doctrine the grand distinction between a standing and a falling church.

Yet we should also observe, that " the truth itself may be held in unrighteousness:" and they who receive this doctrine into a proud and carnal heart, by a dead faith, not only awfully deceive themselves, and quiet their consciences in an impenitent, unjustified state; but they bring a reproach upon the truth, and fatally prejudice the minds of men against it; of which they will have a dreadful account to give at the last day. For did all, who hold this doctrine of God our Saviour, adorn it by such a conduct as it is suited to produce; pharisees, sceptics, and infidels, would be deprived of their best weapons, and must fight against the gospel at a vast disadvantage. May the Lord give us all that " faith which worketh by love," that " by works our faith may be made perfect," as the grafted tree is when loaded with fruit on every branch, (Gal. v. 6: James ii. 17—26).

ESSAY XII.

On Regeneration.

When the apostle showed the Ephesians, that " they were saved by grace, through faith," he added, that this " faith was not of themselves, but was the gift of God," (Eph. ii. 8—10): whence we learn, that the faith which is the sole recipient of all the blessings of salvation, is itself the effect of a Divine influence upon the soul, that all boasting may be most effectually excluded. This gracious operation is represented in Scripture under several metaphors, of which regeneration (that is being born again, born of God, or born of the Spirit) is the most frequent and remarkable: and the present Essay will be appropriated to the discussion of this interesting subject.

Nicodemus, a pharisee, a scribe, and a member of the Jewish sanhedrim, came to Jesus by night: for (notwithstanding his conviction that he was a teacher sent from God) he was afraid or ashamed of being known to consult him, concerning the doctrine that he came to inculcate. The state of his mind accorded to the darkness which prevailed at the season of this interview: and he seems to have expected some instructions coincident with the traditions of pharisees, and their ideas of religion, and of the Messiah's kingdom, which they considered as consisting in external forms and advantages. But our Lord, with a two-fold most solemn asseveration, peculiar to himself on the most important occasions, abruptly assured him, that " except a man were born again, he could not see the kingdom of God;" or discern its real nature and excellency: and when Nicodemus expressed his astonishment at this assertion, in such language as aptly illustrates the apostle's meaning, when he says, " that the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man" (1 Cor. ii. 14;) our Lord answered with the same solemnity,

Digitized by Google

that "except a man were born of water and of the Spirit, he could not enter into the kingdom of God." Water had been used in divers ways, as an external emblem of internal purification; and the use of it was intended to be continued, in the ordinance of baptism, under the new dispensation; it was, therefore, proper to mention it as the outward sign of that change, which could only be effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. He next showed the indispensible necessity of this new birth; "that which is born of the flesh," or derived by natural generation from fallen Adam, "is flesh," or carnal in its propensities and inclinations; "and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," or spiritual, holy, and heavenly, like its Divine Author (Rom. viii. 1—16.) He then told Nicodemus not to wonder at his declaration, that even Jews, pharisees and scribes, "must be born again;" and illustrated the subject by the wind, the precise cause of which, in all its variations, cannot easily be ascertained; nor its motions and energy altered or abated; but which is very manifest in its powerful effects. And when Nicodemus still inquired "how these things could be?" he in return expressed his surprise, that a teacher of Israel should be at a loss about such a subject; and concluded by representing this part of his instructions as "earthly things," when compared with the deep mysteries of his person and redemption, which he next declared to him as "heavenly things." For this change takes place on earth continually, even as often as sinners are turned from their evil ways, and become truly pious and holy persons: it is a change that may aptly be illustrated by the most common concerns of life: it lies as level to our capacities (if our minds were unprejudiced,) as almost any of the works of God, with which we are surrounded; and the necessity of it may be proved by as cogent and conclusive arguments, as any thing of a worldly nature can be. The question then is, What did our Lord mean by "being born again," or "born of the Spirit?" To which I shall first endeavour to give a plain and particular answer, subjoining a compendious review of the arguments, by which the necessity of regeneration hath been often proved; and concluding with some observations and inferences of a practical nature and tendency.

It scarce need be said, that the ordinance of baptism, however administered, is not "regeneration by the Spirit." They who resolve all that is said in scripture on this head, into the observance of this external rite, must suppose, that none can enter Christ's church on earth, or his kingdom in heaven, or even understand the real nature of them, unless they have been baptized with water; whatever be their character, or the cause of the omission: nay, moreover, they must suppose, that all baptized persons are truly illuminated, real Christians and heirs of heaven; for all that are born of God, are his children and heirs. No doubt baptism is (as circumcision was) the outward sign of regeneration: but they who are satisfied with the outward sign, without the inward and spiritual grace, should return to the school or to the nursery, to learn over again a part of their catechism; as it is plain they have forgotten it: for it expressly states the inward and spiritual grace and baptism to be "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." Indeed the Fathers (as they are called) soon began to speak on this subject in unscriptural language: and our pious reformers, from an undue regard to them, and the circumstances of the times, have retained some expressions in the liturgy, which are not only inconsistent with their other doctrine; but which also tend to confuse men's minds, and mislead their judgment on this important subject: but it is obvious, from the words above cited, and many other passages, that they never supposed the mere outward administration of baptism to be regeneration, in the strict sense of the word: nor can any man, without the most palpable absurdity, overlook the difference between the baptism that is outward in the flesh, and that of the heart by the Spirit, whose "praise is not of men but of God," (Rom. ii. 29; 1 Peter iii. 19.)

Nor does regeneration merely signify a reformation of the outward conduct, or a ceasing from vice to practise virtue. Some persons have been so preserved from immoralities, that they do not want such an outward refor-

Digitized by Google

mation as is meant by those who favour this interpretation: yet they too must be born again, or they can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God. But indeed, if the strong language, and multiplied figures of the scripture on this subject, mean nothing more than this; we must be constrained to allow, that the plainest matter in the world is so covered and obscured by mysterious language, as to render it extremely perplexing and even unintelligible to ordinary readers: for how should they suppose, according to the dictates of unlettered common sense, that such solemnity of introduction, emphasis of expression, and accumulation of metaphors, only meant, that "a wicked man could not be an heir of heaven, unless he amended his life?" For scarce any body, except a downright infidel, or profligate, ever supposed that he could. Nor is regeneration a mere conversion from one creed or sect to another: or even from atheism, Judaism, infidelity, or idolatry, to Christianity. A man might pass through changes of this kind, till he had tried all the modes of religion that have been known on earth; and yet at last be excluded, as unregenerate and unclean, from the kingdom of heaven. Neither does it mean any kind of impressions, or new revelations; any succession of terrors and consolations; or any whisper, as it were, from God to the heart concerning his secret love, choice, or purpose to save a man. Many such experiences have been declared by those who continued slaves to their sins; and Satan, transformed into an angel of light, hath done immense mischief in this way. Some of these things indeed (such as terror, and consolation succeeding to it) commonly accompany a saving change: others, which are evidently enthusiastic, may nevertheless be found in the case of some, who are really born of God; yet they are neither regeneration itself, nor any effect or evidence of it; but rather a disgraceful and injurious appendage to it, arising from human infirmity, and the devices of Satan.

We allow the expressions, "born of God," or "born again," to be figurative, but then the metaphor is significant and proper. A new-born infant is a new creature, brought into the world by Almighty power, endued with life, and certain propensities and capacities. It is a human being, and has all things pertaining to our nature, in a weak and incipient state: but by proper care and sustenance it may grow up to maturity, and the perfection of manhood. In like manner, the Divine power produces in the mind of a sinner such a change as renders him a new creature, with new propensities and capacities: but these are only in a feeble and incipient state, and exposed in much opposition and danger on every side. Provision is made for "this new-born babe, in the sincere milk of the word," and in the salvation of Christ; by means of which, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the regenerate man grows up gradually to maturity. No new faculties are communicated in this change, but a new and heavenly direction is given to those which the Creator had bestowed, but which sin had perverted. The capacity of understanding, believing, loving, rejoicing, &c., previously belonged to the man's nature: but the capacity of understanding the real glory and excellency of heavenly things, of believing the humbling truths of revelation in an efficacious manner; of loving the holy beauty of the Divine character and image; and of rejoicing in God's favour and service, belong to him as born of the Spirit. Regeneration may therefore be defined as "a change wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the understanding, will, and affections of a sinner, which is the commencement of a *new kind of life*, and which gives another direction to his judgment, desires, pursuits, and conduct." The mind seems to be first prepared by a divine energy, (like the removal of a film or other obstruction from the eyes of a blind man), to perceive the real nature, and comparative value of the objects around him; concerning which, through the ignorance and depravity of his fallen nature, the corrupt maxims of the world, and the artifices of Satan, he had formed a very erroneous judgment. Thus the eyes of his understanding are opened, and the light of divine truth, which is diffused around him, shines into his heart, and gradually rectifies his errors and misapprehensions, (Acts xvi. 14;

Digitized by Google

xxvi. 18; Eph. i. 19). The will and affections also are influenced in the same manner: and the man is now disposed to fear, hate, and shun what before he delighted in, or regarded as harmless; and to love, choose, desire, and rejoice in those things that before he despised or hated. He seems to be introduced, as it were, into a new world, in which he views himself and all things around him, through a new medium. He wonders that he had not before seen them in the same light: and is frequently so amazed at the insensibility or delusions of mankind, that he is not easily convinced but that proper instructions would bring them all over to his sentiments. He has now a whole system, as it were, of affections, of which he formerly had no conception: his fears and hopes, attachments and aversions, joys and sorrows, successes and disappointments, principally relate to those objects which before gave him scarcely any concern, but which now appear to him of such vast importance, that the objects which once engrossed his mind, proportionably dwindle into insignificancy, when he does not see them to be criminal, polluting, and insnaring. Hence it comes to pass, that except as a sense of duty retains him in his station, or inforces his application to business or study, he is very apt to grow inattentive to such matters, deeming them comparatively mere trifles.

It is not to be expected, that we should describe the manner in which the Holy Spirit effects this internal change: for we cannot understand how God creates, and forms the body in the womb, or how he breathes into it the breath of life. It is of more importance for us to be able with precision to ascertain those effects, by which it is distinguished from every species of counterfeits. Among these we may mention, an habitual and prevailing regard to the authority, favour, displeasure, and glory of God, in the general tenor of a man's conduct, even in his most secret retirement: an abiding sense of his all-seeing eye, his constant presence, and his all-directing and sustaining providence: and an unwavering persuasion of his right to our worship, love, and service, and of our obligations and accountableness to him. Connected with this, regeneration always produces a deep and efficacious apprehension of the reality, nearness, and importance of eternal things, and our infinite concern in them; so that, compared with them, all temporal things appear as nothing. This will be accompanied with a new disposition to reverence, examine, believe, and submit to the decisions of the holy Scriptures; yea, a desire after, and delight in them, as the proper nourishment of the soul, (1 Pet. ii. 2). If the subject of this change were previously destitute of religious knowledge, he will find that an increasing acquaintance with the holiness of God, and his obligations to him; with the reasonableness, spirituality, and sanction of the Divine law; and with his own past and present conduct, dispositions, motives, and affections, as compared with this perfect standard; will lead him to an increasing conviction of his sinfulness, his exposedness to deserved wrath, his inability to justify or save himself, and his need of repentance, forgiveness, and the influences of divine grace: and if he before had a doctrinal knowledge of these things, the truth that had lain dormant, will now become a living principle of action in his soul. Thus, self-dependence, and every towering imagination will be cast down; all his supposed righteousness will be found to have sprung from corrupt motives, and to have been both defective and defiled; and whatever his previous character may have been, "God be merciful to me a sinner," will be the genuine language of his heart. So that deep humiliation and self-abasement, a broken and a contrite spirit, godly sorrow, repentance, conversion to God, &c., are the never-failing effects of regeneration. Then the Divine Saviour, and his merits, atonement, and mediation, with all the parts of his great salvation begin to appear glorious in his eyes, and to become precious to his heart; he now sees the wisdom, and feels the power of the doctrine of the cross, which before he deemed foolishness, and learns to glory in it: he now counts all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and gladly receives and believes in him, in his several offices of prophet, priest, and king, (John

Digitized by Google

i. 12, 13; 1 John v. 1). Thus he learns to love him; to admire the excellency of his character, to value his favour, and to desire communion with him above all things; to be thankful for his unspeakable love, and inestimable benefits; to be zealous for his honour, and devoted to his cause; to love the brethren for his sake, and neighbours and enemies after his example, (1 John iii. 14; iv. 7—21); and to exercise self-denial, to endure loss, hardship, and suffering in his service. In short, "whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world, hates sin, and doeth righteousness," (1 John ii. 29; iii. 9, 10; v. 4); for the regenerate man "beholds the glory of God," (especially in the face of Christ), "and is changed into the same image," &c. (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18; iv. 4—6): so that repentance, faith, love of God and man, submission, patience, meekness, spirituality, temperance, justice, truth, purity, and all the fruits of the Spirit, are the genuine effects of that change without which "no man can see, or enter into the kingdom of God;" though the whole is imperfect in the degree, and counteracted by the remaining power of in-dwelling sin, and manifold temptations.

That this is the real meaning of this Scriptural expression may be further evinced, by briefly considering several other metaphors, which express the same change. It is called a *new creation;* and "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new," (2 Cor. v. 17); and the apostle speaks of it with allusion to the creation of the world, when "God commanded light to emerge out of darkness," order out of confusion, and beauty out of deformity, (2 Cor. iv. 6; Eph. ii. 10; iv. 24): nor does "any thing avail in Christ but a new creature," (Gal. vi. 15). It is also called a *resurrection.* There are, so to speak, three kinds of life; animal, rational, and spiritual. Animal life implies the capacity of performing animal functions, and relishing animal pleasures, which man possesses in common with the brutes; rational life rises a degree above this, and includes the capacity of rational investigation, and of relishing an intellectual pleasure, of which mere animals have no conception; this man possesses in common with the unembodied spirits; but spiritual life is a still nobler distinction, and the perfection of created being, as it consists in the capacity of performing, and delighting in, spiritual actions; in which angels find their chief felicity, but of which the most rational man in the world, who is not born again, is as entirely incapable as the brutes are of philosophy. Animal life may subsist without either intellectual or spiritual capacities, *these* may subsist apart from animal propensities; and an *intelligent* agent may be destitute of *spiritual* capacity, as fallen angels are; but *spiritual* life pre-supposes *rational* powers. Adam, created in the image of God, possessed them all, but when he sinned, he lost his *spiritual* life, for the spirit of life departed, and he became dead in sin: thenceforth he possessed the propensities of animal nature, and the capacities of an intelligent agent, but he became incapable of delighting in the *spiritual* excellency of divine things; and this is the condition of every man until "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes him free from the law of sin and death," (Rom. viii. 2); which constitutes that figurative resurrection of which we speak, (Rom. vi. 4; Eph. ii. 1, 5, 6; Col. iii. 1). Again, the Lord promises "a new heart and a new spirit;" "a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone;" and "to write his law in the heart," (Ezek. xxxvi. 26; Jer. xxxi. 31—33); which implies a change wrought in the judgment, dispositions, and affections, as a preparation for obeying, "not by constraint but willingly." This is also described as putting off, "or crucifying the old man, or the flesh, with its affections and lusts," and "putting on the new man;" that we may be "renewed in the spirit of our mind, and transformed in the renewing of our mind," It is called "the circumcision of the heart to love the Lord," (Deut. xxx. 6): and it is represented by the grafting of a tree, through which the nature of it is changed and meliorated, and made to bear good fruit. These and such like metaphors and similitudes abundantly illustrate and confirm the explanation given of regeneration: but can never be made to coincide with the

Digitized by Google

sentiments of those who explain it of an outward form or amendment; or of such as mistake some transient impressions or emotions for this abiding change.

The necessity of regeneration might be rested on the solemn and repeated declarations of the Saviour and Judge of men; for the multitudes who hope for heaven, whilst they pay no regard to this part of Scripture, strangely presume, either that Christ was mistaken, or that he will depart from his word in their favour. But other conclusive proofs may be adduced, "that unless a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God:" which result from the nature of God and of man, of true religion, and of happiness. No creature can be satisfied, unless its capacities of enjoyment coincide with its sources of pleasure, or unless it subsist in its proper element. The animals are perfectly satisfied with their several modes of living, whilst unmolested, and sufficiently provided for; but they are uneasy when out of their place, though in a situation which pleases other animals. Different men also have diverse tastes, none is comfortable unless his inclination be gratified; and every one is apt to wonder what pleasure others can take in that which is irksome to him. But who is there, that *naturally* takes delight in the spiritual worship and service of God? Are not these things man's weariness and aversion? And do not men in general deem those persons melancholy, who renounce other pleasures for them? That "which is born of the flesh is flesh," or carnal; "and the carnal mind is enmity against God; whose holy perfections, spiritual law and worship, sovereign authority and humbling truth, are disliked by all unregenerate men, in proportion as they are acquainted with them. This is manifest, not only from the vices of mankind, but from their idolatry, infidelity, superstition, and impiety; for they have in every age, almost with one consent, preferred any absurdity to the truths, precepts and ordinances of revelation; and any base idol to the Holy One of Israel! Indeed every man, who carefully watches his own heart, whilst he thinks seriously of the omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, justice, holiness, truth, and sovereignty of God; of his laws, threatenings, and judgments; and of his own past and present sins, will find "a witness in himself," of the enmity of the carnal mind against God. So that except a man be born again, he cannot take any pleasure in God, nor can God take any pleasure in him; he cannot be subject to his law, he cannot come to, or walk with him, (Amos iii. 3): he cannot render him unfeigned praises and thanksgivings, but must either neglect religion, or be a mere formalist; he cannot deem the service of God perfect freedom, or his privilege, honour, and happiness: he cannot exercise unfeigned repentance for all his sins, but must, in part at least, exalt himself, palliate his crimes, object to the severity of God, and murmur at his appointments: he cannot cordially receive the gospel, or live by faith in Christ, for "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" or perceive the preciousness of his person, mediation, and kingdom, the glory of his cross, his unsearchable riches, and incomprehensible love. He cannot unfeignedly give him the whole glory of his salvation; or practise, from proper motives, meekness, patience, gratitude, forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies, or count all but loss for Christ; renounce all for him; bear reproach and persecution for his sake; devote himself to his service, even unto death; and then at last receive eternal life as the free gift of God in him. Nor can he enter into the spiritual meaning of divine ordinances, (especially of baptism and the Lord's Supper); or seek the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, with decided preference; or love the true worshippers of God, as the excellent and honourable of the earth. Nay, an unregenerate man would not savour the company, the work, the worship, or the joy of heaven; but would be disgusted even with the songs and employments of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect; as persons of different descriptions may know, by "a witness in themselves," if they will but carefully consider the subject. But the nature of God, of holiness, of happiness, and of heaven, is un-

Digitized by Google

changeable: and therefore, either we must be changed, or we cannot be either holy or happy.

All the scriptures referred to, imply, that regeneration is wrought by "the exceeding greatness of the mighty power of God:" but it should be observed, that he operates on the minds of rational creatures according to their nature. The renewal of a fallen angel to the Divine image, would be as real a display of omnipotence, as his first creation; and in some respects a greater: but the Lord might effect this change in a different manner. Having made use of *truth* (as the medium of his almighty energy), to overcome the dark and obstinate enmity of his fallen nature; and to produce a willingness to be restored: he might afterwards require his concurrence in the use of means, through which that recovery should be effected. Now we are informed, that the Lord regenerates sinners by his *word* (James i, 18; 1 Pet. i, 23); ministers, therefore, and parents, and many others, in different ways, are bound to set before those, committed to their care, the word of truth; and to treat them as reasonable creatures, addressing their understanding and consciences, their hopes, fears, and all the passions and powers of their souls; beseeching God "to give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." And they who are convinced that such a change must take place in them, or else that they must be miserable, should be induced by the consideration that they cannot change their own hearts, (that being the work of the Holy Spirit), to seek this needful blessing, by reading the Scriptures, retirement, meditation, self-examination, hallowing the Lord's day, hearing faithful preaching and other instruction, breaking off known sin, practising known duties, avoiding vain company and dissipation, and earnestly praying to God to "create in them a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within them." For convictions of our inability have a similar effect upon us in other cases: and lead us to seek help from them that are able to help us. To those who continue to treat this subject with contempt and derision, we can only say, that as such persons will neither believe our testimony, nor that of Christ; they will at last have no cause to complain, if they are left destitute of that which they have so despised. Some may believe that *such things are*, who are yet at a loss to know *what they are*: to them I would say, "beg of God daily and earnestly to teach you what it is to be born again;" and in time your own experience will terminate your perplexity. But let those who admit the doctrine, beware lest they rest in the *notion*, without the experience and effects of it. And finally, let those who have known the happy change, know also that they need to be changed more and more: and should therefore unite with gratitude, for what the Lord hath wrought, persevering prayer, for a more complete renewal into the Divine image, in all the powers, dispositions, and affections of their souls.

ESSAY XIII.

On the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit, with some Thoughts on the Doctrine of the Sacred Trinity.

CHRISTIANITY is styled by the apostle "the ministration of the Spirit," (2 Cor. iii. 8;) and a careful investigation of the Scriptures may suffice to convince any impartial inquirer, that the promise of the Holy Ghost is the grand peculiarity of the New Testament; even as that of the Messiah was of the old dispensation. Having considered regeneration, or a man's being "born of the Spirit," or "born of God;" it regularly occurs to us in this place to give a more particular statement of the Scripture doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit. What relates to his personality and Deity, and to the

Digitized by Google

doctrine of the Trinity as connected with it, will constitute the subject of the present Essay: and the extraordinary and ordinary operations, influences, and gifts of the Spirit; the office he performs in the economy of our salvation; and the duties resulting from them, must be reserved for the next Essay.

When we use the term *personality*, in the discussion of this subject, we only mean, that language is used in Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit, and actions are ascribed to him, which lead us to think of him as a distinct Agent, and such as would be extremely improper, if a mere attribute or mode of operation were intended. Yet all must entertain this sentiment, who deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, and yet pay any suitable respect to the sacred oracles, in which so much is constantly ascribed to him. But we do not suppose, that the words "*person*," and *personality* can, in an adequate manner, explain to us the distinct subsistence of the Spirit: or assist our conceptions in respect of mysteries, which we profess to consider as absolutely incomprehensible. These words, indeed, in this use of them, are not found in scripture: but when divine truths are opposed with ingenuity, learning, and pertinacity; it becomes necessary for those "who would contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," to vary their expressions: because their opponents will invent some plausible method of explaining away those terms, which had before been made use of. That imperfection which characterizes every thing that belongs to man, is peculiarly discernible in human language: the mysteries of the infinite God can only be declared to us in words primarily taken from the relations and affairs of men; and every thing that relates to infinity, confounds and overwhelms our finite and narrow capacities. The most careful and able writers cannot, on such topics, wholly prevent their readers from attaching ideas to their words, which they meant not to convey by them: so that they, whose object it is to put an absurd construction on our expressions, or to enervate, by a plausible interpretation, the language of holy scripture, will never find it very difficult to accomplish their purpose, as far as the generality of mankind are concerned. If we speak of three distinct Persons in the Godhead, they may charge us with holding three distinct gods: supposing, or pretending we mean, that this *incomprehensible* distinction is perfectly like the *obvious* distinction of three men from each other. On the other hand, the labour, study, and ingenuity of revolving centuries have so perplexed the subject, that we cannot at present find words explicitly to define our meaning, and exactly to mark the difference of our sentiments from those of our opponents, unless we use such exceptionable terms: at least, this is my principal reason for adhering to them. But if our expressions convey to the reader's mind the doctrine of scripture, with as much perspicuity and precision as human language generally admits of; it is mere trifling to object to them, because they are not found in the Bible: for *truths* not *words* constitute the matter of revelation; and *words* are only the vehicle of *truths* to our minds. If some men have got the habit or art of evading the force of Scriptural terms, and thus mislead others into error; it is not only allowable, but needful, for us to state our sentiments in other words, and then to prove that those sentiments are actually contained in holy Scripture; unless we be disposed to give our opponents every advantage in the argument. For it cannot well be doubted by impartial persons, but that aversion to the *doctrines themselves* lies at the bottom of those objections that are made to the *words*, in which their defenders have been used to express them.

We proceed therefore to consider the personality of the Holy Spirit; premising, that as "these are heavenly things," (John iii. 12, 13), we can neither explain them clearly in human language, nor illustrate them fully by any earthly things, nor yet prove them by arguments from human reason: for the whole rests entirely on the authority of divine revelation: we gain our knowledge of them by simply believing God's sure testimony; and we should improve them to practical purposes in humble adoration, and not treat

Digitized by Google

them as subjects of disputatious speculation, or presumptuous curiosity. And may he, "who hath promised to give his Holy Spirit to those who ask for him," guide us by his divine teaching into the sanctifying knowledge of the truth, in this and every subject that we investigate.

We may, I presume, be allowed to say, that if such language be uniformly used in the Scriptures concerning the Holy Spirit, as in all other cases would convey to our minds the ideas of personality and personal agency; the true believer will conclude him to be a personal agent. In allegories, indeed, and in sublime poetry, we often find attributes, propensities, or modes of operation personified: but none, except the most ignorant reader, is in danger of being misled by such adventurous figures of speech. Should any man suppose that Wisdom, in the book of Proverbs, was introduced merely as an allegorical person; we might allow that he had some colour for his opinion: though I should rather say, that the Messiah, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, who is made wisdom to us, is the real speaker in those passages. But if such bold figures of speech are supposed, without any intimation, to be interwoven in historical or didactic discussions, or in promises and precepts, that is *grants* and *laws*, where the greatest precision is absolutely necessary, what instruction can be *certainly* derived from revelation? or how shall we know what we are to believe, to do, or to expect? Surely this tends directly to render the Scriptures useless; and to perplex and bewilder every serious inquirer after the way of eternal life! But it is from discourses of this lattter kind especially, that I shall select my proofs of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord promised his disciples, "that he would pray the Father, and he should give them *another Comforter*, that he might abide with them for ever," &c. (John xiv. 16, 17:) and afterwards he added, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father shall send in my name, *he* shall teach you all things," &c. (ver. 26:) and the personal pronoun (*αυτος*) is used in this, and several other passages, especially those that follow. Calling this Comforter "the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father," he added, "*he* shall testify of me," &c. (John xv. 26:) and still more explicitly, he says, when "*he* cometh, he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever *he* shall hear, that shall he speak:" "*he* shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John xvi. 7—15.) Not to insist further on the repeated use of the personal pronoun, which the ordinary rules of language appropriates *in such discourses*, to a personal agent; being *sent, coming, testifying, receiving, showing, teaching, hearing*, and *speaking*, do undoubtedly imply personal agency: and if we are required to suppose the strongest rhetorical figures, that ever orators or poets have used, to be constantly interwoven in the plainest instructions and promises; we must infer, that the language of the scripture is so indeterminate and unusual, that no certain conclusions can be drawn from it. This indeed seems to be the inference that some interpreters of the scripture are willing should be deduced from their observations: but an insinuation more dishonourable to God and his holy word can hardly be imagined.

In like manner, St. Paul, when expressly instructing the Corinthians concerning the gifts of the Spirit, uses the strongest personal language: "all these worketh that one and self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as *he will*," (1 Cor. xii. 11:) but are not *working, dividing*, and *willing* personal acts? or can such terms be used of a mere *attribute*, consistently with the precision required in religious instructions? He also speaks of the Spirit, as "searching all things, yea the deep things of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10,) for he knoweth the things of "God, as the spirit of man knoweth the things of a man." The Holy Spirit is also said to *dwell in us*, to *lead us*, to "*bear witness with our spirits*, and to *make intercession for us*;" whilst "he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the *mind* of the Spirit;" which certainly implies personal distinction (Rom. viii. 11, 14, 16, 26, 27.) The sacred historian also records several instances, in which the Holy Spirit spoke, acted, and com-

Digitized by Google

manded. "The Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David" (Acts i. 16.) "The Spirit said to Philip," (Acts viii. 29). The spirit said to Peter, "Arise, get thee down," (Acts x. 19, 30). The Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul: and they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed," (Acts xiii. 2, 4). "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost," (Acts xv. 28). "They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost,"—"The Spirit suffered them not," (Acts xvi. 6, 7). "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias," &c. (Acts xxviii. 25.) To which the language of other Scriptures accord; "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith," (Heb. iii. 7.) "Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," (Rev. ii. 7.) That this is the frequent phraseology of Scripture is undeniable: and as the sacred oracles were given to make us wise unto salvation; so it is evident, that we are taught in them to think of the Holy Spirit as of an Agent, *willing, hearing, speaking, acting, commanding, forbidding, receiving, and executing a commission;* and performing a part in the great work of our salvation, distinct from that of the Father, by whom, or that of the Son, through whom he is given unto men. I apprehend that they who deny this doctrine, would feel themselves embarrassed in familiarly using such language as this, concerning the Spirit, or in speaking according to the oracles of God in their discoures, treatises or devotions; at least many of them deem it convenient to adopt a more literal, philosophical, or modern style than that of the Scriptures, lest they should mislead some of their unestablished disciples, or give men reason to call their consistency in question.

When the personality of the Holy Spirit has been proved from the word of God, little difficulty remains to ascertain his Deity. The operation of the Holy Ghost in our Lord's conception, rendered it proper to call him the Son of God, even in respect to his human nature, according to the language of Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, (Luke i. 35). Ananias, by "lying to the Holy Ghost, lied unto God," (Acts v. 3, 4). Christians are "the temple of God, because the Spirit of God dwelleth in them;" even "an habitation of God through the Spirit," (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; vi. 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 22). Indeed, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, in all believers, wheresoever they are dispersed, evidently implies the divine attribute of omnipresence; nor could he "search all things, yea, even the deep things of God," unless he were omniscient. His work of regeneration, or new creation, and sanctification, require omnipotence to effect it: and all these surely are divine attributes, incommunicable to any creature. But "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," (Rom. viii. 9—11): and they are strangely ignorant of Christianity, who do not "know that Christians are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them." Of this more abundant proof will be given when we come to consider the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit.

The very titles which are given to this distinguished Agent in all revivals of vital godliness, confirm the same conclusion. He is called, by way of eminence, "the Holy Spirit," "the Spirit of Holiness," "the Spirit of Truth," "the Spirit of Power," "the Spirit of Promise," "the Spirit of Wisdom and Knowledge," "the Comforter," "the Eternal Spirit." These, and several other expressions of a similar nature, seem to denote both his essential perfections, and the nature or effect of his influences on our minds; and to distinguish him from all those created spirits which are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. And when it is said, that "he divideth to every man severally as he will;" his divine sovereignty, as well as his personal volition, is declared to us.

But if distinct personality, agency, and divine perfections be in Scripture ascribed also to the Father and to the Son, no words seem more exactly to express the unavoidable inference than these, "that there are three distinct Persons in the Unity of the Godhead." The Scripture most assuredly teaches us, "that the One living and true God is, in some inexplicable manner, Triune:" for he is spoken of as One in some respects, as Three in others

Digitized by Google

The dependence, confidence, affections, and worship peculiar to Christianity, are manifestly connected by an indissoluble tie, with our sentiments on this respect: for, (not to anticipate the subject of the ensuing Essay) how can we avoid grieving the Spirit, if we entertain thoughts of him infinitely beneath his divine dignity and excellency?

Men may continue confidently to assert without proof, that the doctrine of the Trinity is either a contradiction in itself, or inconsistent with the Unity of the Deity: they may inform us, that the primitive Christians learned it from Plato and his followers, and so corrupted the faith by philosophy (though it is a thousand times more likely, that Plato borrowed his ideas from those Scriptures, which were extant in his time:) and they may dignify themselves as Unitarians, as if none worshipped the one true God but themselves. But we shall still have the satisfaction (mingled with our regret at such departures from the faith) to find, that they grow proportionably shy of the phraseology of the Scripture; that they want to diminish men's reverence for the sacred writers; that they are constrained to adopt methods of interpretation, in respect of those testimonies, which they still admit to be a divine revelation, that would be deemed contemptible, if employed in fixing the sense of any reputable classical writer; and that they make their principal appeal, not to the oracles of God, but to the oracles of human reason, or to the vague and disputed standard of antiquity. It must be evident to all who are conversant with modern treatises on these subjects, that the opposers of the doctrine no longer attempt to support their sentiments by a particular examination of Scripture testimonies, allowing the Bible, as we have received it from our fathers, to be the infallible word of God; and that it ought to be interpreted by the same rules, which judicious scholars employ in explaining other ancient writers. A small part of the Scripture is by them considered to be of divine authority; and the rest they would have us discard as doubtful, or irrational, or at most to give it a subordinate measure of attention.

Could it be proved, that the Trinitarians were not Unitarians also, some ground would be gained by them; but we suppose, that the Trinity of Persons in the Deity consists with the Unity of the Divine Essence: though we pretend not to explain the *modus* of it, and deem those to have been reprehensible, who have attempted so to do; as the *modus*, in which any being subsists, according to its distinct nature and known properties, is a secret to the most learned naturalists to this present day, and probably will continue to be so. But if the most common of God's works, with which we are the most conversant, be, *in this respect*, incomprehensible; how can men think that the *modus existendi*, (or manner of existence) of the infinite Creator can be level to their capacities?—The doctrine of the Trinity is indeed a mystery: but no man hath yet shown, that it involves in it a real contradiction. Many have ventured to say, that it ought to be ranked with transubstantiation, as equally absurd. But Archbishop Tillotson has shown, by the most convincing arguments imaginable, that transubstantiation includes the most palpable contradictions; and that we have the evidence of our eyes, feeling, and taste, that what we receive in the Lord's Supper is bread, and not the body of a man; whereas we have only the testimony of our *eyes*, that the words, "This is my body," are in the Scriptures.—Now this is intelligible to the meanest capacity, fairly made out, and perfectly unanswerable: but who ever attempted thus to *prove* the doctrine of the Trinity to be self-contradictory? Or what testimony of our senses, or demonstrated proposition, does it contradict? Yet, till this be shown, it is neither fair, nor convincing, to exclaim against it as contradictory, absurd, irrational, &c.

Indeed, it may be easy to say that Three and One cannot be the same; and then to show, that the absurd tenet which they would persuade men that we hold, is self-contradictory: but if we may not quote the much-contested text, (1 John v. 7, 8) as an authority, we may surely use it as expressing our sentiments: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are one;" three Persons, the

Digitized by Google

masculine being used; one Being, the neuter being substituted. Now let any man in logical form prove if he can, that these words involve a real contradiction: but till this is done, let no man mistake confident assertion for demonstration.

I cannot but hope, that the preceding concise arguments have fully shown, that the sacred writers spoke as strong language, concerning the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit, as even the Nicene Fathers: though they did not use such illustrations, explanations, distinctions, or definitions, as the latter unhappily employed in the controversy. Nor can I doubt, but that the Deity of Christ hath been fully proved in the seventh and eighth Essays. And if these two points have been established on Scriptural authority, all that can be said against the doctrine of the Trinity on other grounds, only suggests these questions:—Is the human intellect, or the infinite understanding of God, most competent to determine on the incomprehensible mysteries of the Divine Nature? Shall we abide by the language of inspiration, or give it up for that of human reason? But what is faith? Is it not a disposition to say, "let God be true, and every man a liar?" For "the testimony of God is sure, and giveth wisdom to the simple." If the Scriptures be incontestably proved to be the word of God, by unanswerable external and internal evidences; and a man shall dare to say, "that to allow such a doctrine as that of the Trinity to be contained in it, is enough to impeach its divine authority;" it amounts only to this, that he is so wise in his own eyes, so leans to his own understanding, and is so fond of his own sentiments, that he is determined not to be convinced by any testimony, human or divine.

In addition to the general argument for the doctrine in question, which has been considered, it may be proper to consider a few remarkable passages of Scripture, in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are mentioned together, or jointly addressed in the same act of worship. When our Lord was baptized, the Father by a voice from heaven, declared him to be his beloved Son, and publicly sealed his appointment to the mediatorial office; of which he solemnly accepted, and on which he then entered. And the Holy Spirit, descending visibly, under the emblematic representation of a dove, lighted upon him, as through him to be communicated to all his true disciples; thus the Three Persons in the sacred Trinity, evidently acted according to the parts sustained by them in the great work of man's salvation. But the appointed form of Christian baptism is far more conclusive, "Baptize them into the *name*" (not names) "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." By baptism we declare our dependence on, and devotedness to him in whose name we are baptised; and it implies one of the most solemn acts of worship that we can perform. Would it not then greatly tend to mislead us, if a mere creature, and an attribute, were joined with the One True God in this ordinance? Upon the Trinitarian system it is extremely proper: but that man must surely have very lax notions of the peculiar honour due to God, which he will not give to another, who can think it consistent with the doctrine of our opponents. This form of baptism fully warrants the excellent doxology of our Church, "Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," &c.: and it is worthy of observation, that ancient Anti-trinitarians attempted to improve our Lord's words, saying, "In the name of the Father, and through the Son, and by, or in the Holy Ghost:" which, joined with modern attempts to show the form to be non-essential to baptism, &c., constitutes a full proof that the argument is of great force, even in the opinion of our opponents. When our Lord says, (John xvi. 13—15), "The Spirit of Truth,—*He* shall glorify me,—all that the Father hath are mine," &c.; he establishes the doctrine of the Trinity. The personality, and consequently the Deity of the Spirit, has been proved from many testimonies: if *all things* belonging to the Father, belong to Christ also, his Deity must be allowed: and thus the three persons in the Trinity are here pointed out to our observation. The apostolic benediction

Digitized by Google

(2 Cor. xiii. 14), refers to the One Name in which Christians are baptised; and leads our thoughts to the form of blessing appointed in the law, (Numb. vi. 24—26); in which benedictions were pronounced on the people with a threefold repetition of the name of Jehovah, as well as to the adorations of the heavenly hosts, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord," &c. (Isaiah vi. 3; Rev. iv. 8). Now this benediction is in reality a prayer in behalf of the Corinthians, for all the blessings of salvation; and these are sought from the Lord Jesus, and from the Holy Spirit, as well as from God the Father. To this accords the address of the Apostle John to the seven churches in Asia, in which he wishes, or prays, for grace and peace to them, from the eternal Father, from the seven Spirits before the throne, and from the Lord Jesus, &c. (Rev. i. 4—6.) According to the emblematic style of this book, the Holy Spirit, with reference to his manifold gifts and graces, and to the seven churches in Asia, is spoken of as the seven Spirits, &c.: but we cannot doubt of the meaning, nor can we imagine, that any created spirits would have been thus joined with the eternal God, in such an evident act of adoration.

I shall close the present Essay by observing, that the subject before us is of the greatest importance. Either Trinitarians, or Anti-trinitarians, are idolaters; for they cannot both worship that God who reveals himself to us in Scripture; but one of them must substitute an imaginary being in his place. It is not therefore a subject to be decided by sallies of wit, or ostentation of learning, or by attempting to render one another odious or ridiculous. A sober, humble, teachable mind, disposed to believe the testimony of God, is above all things requisite in such inquiries; this must be sought of God by fervent prayer; and then the Scriptures must be daily and diligently examined with an obedient and reverential mind. The writer of these remarks was once an Anti-trinitarian, and on the point of leaving the Church of England, from objections to her doctrine and worship in *this respect*. But the study of the Scriptures has changed his judgment: and as he then neglected or disliked the other doctrines which he now values more than life, and was a stranger to vital, experimental religion; so he observes, that they who deny this doctrine, gradually give up other peculiarities of Christianity till the name alone, or very little more, be left of it. He cannot therefore but deem it, (like the key-stone of an arch) essential to the support of evangelical piety; and would subjoin these observations on the Trinity with the apostle's words, "This is the true God, and eternal life; little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

But whilst we deem the rejection of this doctrine as a virtual renunciation of Christian baptism; a dissent from the apostolical benediction; and a substitution of another object of worship in the place of the God of the Bible; and whilst we lament the rapid progress of this destructive heresy, which often proves a forerunner to prepare the way for a more avowed apostacy; we must also observe, that it is almost equally to be lamented, that so few who profess the doctrine, seem to understand its real nature and tendency, or to experience its sanctifying efficacy upon their hearts. Alas! what will it avail any man to have maintained, or even triumphantly contended for this fundamental truth, if he continue the devotee of ambition, avarice, or any other vile affection? Of what use is it to show the distinct offices of the Father, Son, and Spirit, in the work of our salvation; unless we, as lost sinners, depend on the everlasting love and free mercy of the Father; on the merits and mediation of the incarnate Son, and on the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit? No outward administration of baptism can profit those who are not made by "the true baptism," the spiritual worshippers and servants of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Nor can the pronunciation of the apostle's benediction save any man who does not partake of the blessings pronounced, in the inward experience of his own soul.

Moreover, whilst we disregard the charge of bigotry, in refusing all *religious* intercourse with Anti-trinitarians, lest we should give a sanction to

Digitized by Google

their heresy: let us protest against all attempts to injure them in their temporal interests. Every kindness is due to them as men, when they need it; many of them, as good members of society, are entitled to civil respect and commendation; and by this conduct, we shall best silence the censures brought against our principles as intolerant; and prove that they enlarge the heart with the most diffusive philanthropy.

ESSAY XIV.

On the Gifts and Influences of the Holy Spirit.

THE doctrine which is selected for the subject of the present Essay, has *occasioned* a great variety of dangerous or destructive mistakes. Some persons have advanced claims, which seem at least to place them upon an equality in this respect, with the prophets, apostles, and inspired writers; and others, (perceiving the absurdity or arrogance of such pretences; deeming themselves wise, strong, or good, by their native powers and exertions; and having no experience to direct them in discriminating between what is Scriptural and what is anti-scriptural) have argued, that we neither want, nor are warranted to expect any such influences: that they were exclusively vouchsafed to the apostles and primitive Christians; and that all, which is now spoken of the operations or assistance of the Spirit, is mere enthusiasm and delusion. These opposite extremes have also admitted of intermediate errors and variations; whilst some contend, that there is no discoverable distinction between divine influences and the actings of our own minds; and do not clearly admit of an exception, in respect of the diverse effects produced by these distinct causes; others suppose, that they are immediately distinguishable by an inward and a kind of instinctive consciousness, (like that which doubtless assured prophets of their divine inspiration); and thus, whilst they seem to honour the Spirit, and will attempt nothing, till, as they say, they are moved by him, they covertly advance a claim to infallibility and perfection, in those favoured seasons, or impute all their mistakes and follies to this sacred Agent. Nor is it uncommon for men to plead that they are influenced by the Holy Spirit, in order to establish other rules of faith and practice than the written word of God, to bring that, or some parts of it, into a measure of discredit; or even to substitute something wrought in or by them, in the place of the righteousness and atoning blood of that Saviour, whom he, the Spirit, is sent to glorify among men. In short, much enthusiasm and spiritual pride, and many fatal or disgraceful delusions have, on the one hand, arisen from misapprehensions of this subject; and, on the other, multitudes have taken occasion from these things, to treat the whole doctrine with the most profane contempt and derision.

But a careful attention to the Scriptures, and to the ends for which the Holy Spirit was promised, may enable us properly to discriminate in this matter; and to show in what sense, and for what purposes, we ought to expect and depend on the influences of the Spirit, and which of his gifts and operations were peculiar to the primitive times, or to such extraordinary occasions. I shall therefore at present offer some thoughts on the miraculous gifts and powers imparted by the Holy Ghost;—on those ordinary endowments which uninspired men may reasonably expect to receive from him;—on his common influences upon the minds of many unconverted persons;—and on the special nature of those influences which he vouchsafes, and of that sanctifying work which he effects on "the vessels of mercy, prepared before unto glory."

If we accurately mark the language of the Scriptures, we shall find that

Digitized by Google

the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the Author and Giver of all those miraculous and supernatural powers with which any of the human race ever were endued. Not only did "holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," (2 Pet. i. 21); not only did apostles, evangelists, and primitive believers receive the Holy Ghost, to enable them to cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead, speak in languages before unknown, or to interpret the discourses of others: but even Christ himself was "anointed by the Holy Ghost," to work his beneficent miracles, (Acts x. 38): he cast out devils "by the Spirit of God," (Matt. xii. 28); "who was not given to him by measure," (John iii. 34): and through "the Holy Ghost he gave commandments to his apostles," (Acts i. 2). Indeed the promises made to him, in the Old Testament especially, relate to this; and his very title of the *Messiah*, the *Christ*, the *anointed* of the Lord, was derived from it, (Psalm xlv. 7; Isaiah xi. 2, 3; xlii. 1; lix. 21; lxi. 1). Nor can we easily and satisfactorily account for these expressions, or reconcile them with our Lord's conduct in speaking and acting, as in his own name, or by his own authority and power; unless we advert to the distinction between his divine and human nature, and his personal and mediatorial dignity; and remember that in respect to his divine nature, he is one with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit, in all the essence, perfections, and operations of the Godhead. We must therefore consider the Holy Spirit as the great Agent, according to the economy of the everlasting covenant, in the inspiration of the Scriptures, in the performance of all those miracles, by which the messengers of God authenticated their doctrine, and in the revelation of those future events, which being interwoven with every part of the sacred volume, and receiving their accomplishment from age to age, confirm the divine original of the whole to every attentive and impartial inquirer. Such discoveries of the truth and will of God had been made from the beginning: but they became more particular and copious when Israel was brought out of Egypt, and the law was given by Moses. The prophets, and other servants of God, who from time to time were raised up to call the attention of Israel to his law and promises, or to effect extraordinary deliverances for the nation, were endued with miraculous powers by the same Spirit: at the coming of Christ, Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Simeon, &c., spake of him by the Spirit; and his apostles and seventy disciples partook of his extraordinary gifts, and miraculous powers, even before our Lord's crucifixion. Yet the out-pouring of the Spirit, at and after the day of Pentecost, was so vastly superior in energy, extent, and duration, that St. John who had witnessed and shared both, says, in relating the discourses of Christ, "this he spake of the Spirit—for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified," (John vii. 39). Whatever had preceded that great event, might be an earnest of, but did not properly belong to "the dispensation of the Spirit," nor was worthy to be compared with it. But when Jesus was risen, and ascended on high, these gifts were showered down on men in rich abundance, to confirm the testimony of the apostles to his resurrection, and to qualify them and their fellow-workers to spread the gospel through the nations; and being communicated by the laying on of the apostles' hands, the number of witnesses and instruments was continually multiplied, and provision was made for the rapid progress of their salutary doctrine.

The evident design and use of these extraordinary influences of the Spirit was to rouse the attention of a careless world to the spiritual doctrines of the gospel; to counterbalance men's prejudices in favour of their old traditions, and against religious innovations; and to put honour on those who were employed to propagate Christianity in the midst of contempt and persecution. The gift of tongues especially seems to have been indispensably necessary, to enable the first preachers of the gospel to address men of different nations in a suitable manner; and the difficulty of learning the languages of heathen nations, forms, at this day, one grand impediment to the propagation of Christianity. These miraculous powers seem to have conti-

Digitized by Google

nued with the church, in some measure, during the three first centuries; but to have decreased in proportion as the Christian religion obtained establishment in the world. At length, when "the only wise God our Saviour," saw that occasional prejudices had sufficiently subsided, and extraordinary obstacles were in a great degree removed; and that the truth had only to contend with those lusts of man's fallen nature, and those efforts of the powers of darkness which are common to every age and place; he was pleased to withdraw these miraculous operations, and to carry on his work by means of the written word, the fulfilment of prophecies, and other abiding evidences of the truth, and by the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit. But it does not appear that he hath any where declared, that he will no more endue his servants with miraculous powers, or confer on them the spirit of prophecy. We may however be assured, that such powers will never be imparted to enable men to support any thing materially different from that complete revelation which we now possess: and for thirteen hundred years at least, all pretences to miracles or prophecies have tended, in one way or other, to subvert the doctrine contained in the New Testament; and have justly been deemed impostures, or satanical delusions, and marks of antichrist. We allow therefore, that *in this respect*, the promise of the Spirit related to the primitive times, or at least, that all claims at present to such powers, as imply new revelations, predictions, miracles, infallibility, &c., in those who advance them, are enthusiastic, arrogant, and unwarranted.

The Scriptures are fully authenticated, as a complete rule of faith and practice: Christianity has all the advantages which it can possess, in a world that "lieth in the wicked one;" there is no rival system, pretending to be a divine revelation, that can at all stand in competition with it; ministers may obtain needful qualifications, by the ordinary blessing of God on their diligent studies; the establishment which our religion has had for so many ages, and through so many nations, gives it, as it were, a claim by prescription, to the attention of mankind; and the Lord sees these things to be sufficient for the accomplishment of his purposes, in the present state of human affairs.

We may further observe, that miraculous and prophetical powers, imparted by the Holy Spirit, had no inseparable connection with personal sanctity; and they have often been bestowed on very wicked men. Balaam might, in a measure say with David, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue," (Num. xxiii. 5, 16; xxiv. 2, 16—24: 2 Sam. xxiii. 2). Judas doubtless was endued with the power of casting out devils and working miracles, as well as the other apostles; and many will be condemned as *never known* of Christ at the last day, who have done many wonderful works in his name, (Matt. vii. 22, 23; 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3). These gifts were likewise liable to be abused by man's ambition and corrupt passions; and however useful to others, were injurious or even fatal to the possessor, if he were not disposed and enabled by the more common, but far more valuable influences of the Holy Spirit, to use them in humility, zeal, and love, (1 Cor. xii. xiv.)

But there are also other gifts derived from the same Spirit, which are not directly of a sanctifying nature. It is observable, that John the Baptist, who was "filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb," wrought no miracles: yet our Lord declared, that "he was more than a prophet;" and it is evident, that he was more illuminated in the nature of Christ's redemption and kingdom, than any of the apostles were, previous to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. His divine illumination, therefore, according to the Scriptures of the prophets, and his ministerial endowments, though not miraculous, were yet the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The apostles and disciples, on the day of Pentecost, were not only endued with miraculous powers, but greatly advanced in their knowledge of the gospel, delivered from their prejudices and mistakes, raised above the fear of men, and enabled to speak with promptitude, facility, and propriety, far beyond what

Digitized by Google

was natural to them, or what they could have acquired by habit or study. That wonderful change, which, in these respects, took place in them, ought to be ascribed entirely to the agency of the promised Spirit, (John xiv. 26; xvi. 12, 13); and we may hence conclude, that religious knowledge, prudence, fortitude, utterance, and other endowments for the sacred ministry, or for any useful service in the church, are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Diligence indeed in the use of proper means, is required, yet the success of that diligence should be considered as the gift and work of the Spirit of Christ; on him we ought to depend for all needful qualifications for the services allotted us; and whilst we take to ourselves the blame of every mistake, defect, and evil, that mixes with our endeavours, the whole glory of all that is true, wise, or useful, should be ascribed to this divine Agent. This may surely be done, without enthusiasm or arrogance: and the apostle hath taught us to do it, in his before-cited discourse on spiritual gifts, in which he enumerates wisdom, knowledge, and the faculty of speaking to edification, exhortation, and comfort, among the operations of the Spirit; and these are evidently as much wanted at present, as they were in the primitive times, (1 Cor. xiv. 3). We need not then wonder, that the official ministration of numbers at present, is so devoid of pathos, energy, and *Scriptural* wisdom, when we learn, that all dependence on the Holy Spirit in preparing for the ministry or the pulpit is disclaimed by them as enthusiasm and folly: for if no man can say that "Jesus is the Lord," or do any thing effectual to promote the gospel, but by "the Holy Ghost;" and if men, pretending to be teachers, affront this Divine Agent, by rejecting and vilifying his proffered assistance, the consequence must be, that they will be left to oppose or disgrace the faith, instead of preaching it.

But these gifts too may be possessed and exercised by those that are strangers to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Men may be enabled by the Spirit to attain knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, and readiness in speaking or writing about them, whilst they remain ungodly: even as others have possessed miraculous or prophetical gifts, whilst they continued the slaves of avarice or lust. Thus persons may arise, endued with eminent talents, whose preaching may excite great attention, and even do much good; or whose writings illuminate the church, and exceedingly tend to elucidate the truth, and to silence the objections of its enemies; and yet these very men may possibly be themselves *cast-aways*, because they "received not the love of the truth, neither obeyed it, but obeyed unrighteousness." But these are *spiritual* gifts, which are wanted alike at all times; unless it can be believed that men are now so wise and good, and that Christianity is so congenial to our nature, and so generally understood and practiced; that we are fully competent, without any divine assistance, to maintain the cause of it in the world.

It has also been generally allowed by orthodox divines, that there are other influences of the Spirit on the mind, which do not always issue in its sanctification. "To resist the Holy Ghost," seems to mean something more than merely to reject the word of inspiration: and to "quench the Spirit," is not exclusively the sin of believers, when on some occasions they stifle his holy suggestions. He strives with, and powerfully stirs up the minds of many, who are not born again: new principles are not implanted, but natural powers are excited; conscience is influenced in part to perform its office, notwithstanding the opposition of the carnal heart; convincing views are given of many important truths; the Spirit concurs with an address to a man's fear, and even a Felix trembles before a prisoner in chains. A man's hopes are addressed, and "he hears gladly, and does many things," though he will not divorce Herodias: or convincing arguments are applied with energy to an intelligent worldling, and he is almost persuaded to be a Christian. Such characters often take up a profession of the gospel, and continue for a time, or even persist to the end, in an unfruitful form of godliness: and men of this description, when the Spirit has finally ceased to strive with them,

Digitized by Google

have been the principal heresiarchs in every age, while the bulk of heretical societies have been constituted of inferior persons of the same stamp. Yet, as far as truth produces its proper effect, though it be at length borne down by human depravity and temptation, it ought to be ascribed to the Spirit; and in this sense, as well as in respect of miraculous powers, men have been partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have yet fallen away beyond the possibility of being renewed unto repentance, (Heb. vi. 4—6; x. 29). But, on the other hand, these strivings are often preparatory to those "things which accompany salvation;" nor can *we* always exactly distinguish between them, except by the effect: for they resemble two small seeds, which are so much alike, though of distinct species, that our eyes cannot distinguish between them; till, having been sown, they spring up and produce their respective plants, and then they are easily and perfectly known from each other.

The observations that have been made on regeneration, (Essay XII.) introduces what is needful to be added in this place, in respect to the special work and influences of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. We may therefore observe, that the conversion of three thousand persons on the day of Pentecost, the rapid spread of the gospel which followed, and the holiness and joy of the primitive Christians, were as much the effect of that "out-pouring of the Spirit," as the miraculous gifts conferred on the apostles; and the same change wrought in men's characters and conduct by the gospel, must uniformly be ascribed to the same cause.

But we shall be able to mark more precisely the nature of these sanctifying influences of the Spirit, by adverting to the language of Scripture on that subject. The word "Comforter," by which our Lord distinguishes this divine Agent, may also signify an advocate, or an admonisher; and this title implies, that it is his office to plead the cause of God in our hearts, to excite and animate us to all holy duties, and to communicate to us all holy consolations. Water, which purifies, refreshes, and fructifies all nature; and fire, which illuminates, penetrates, melts, softens, and consumes whatever cannot be, as it were, changed into its own nature, are the constant emblems of that Spirit with which Christ baptises his true disciples. When he comes, "he *reproves*," or "*convinces* men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" by his divine light he so discovers to them their obligations to God, and the demands of his perfect law, that they are deeply convinced of guilt, even in such things as before did not burden their consciences; especially, they soon perceive their state of condemnation as unbelievers, and the atrocious evil of not receiving Christ by faith: they are thus convinced of the justice of God in his dealings with sinners, and understand his righteousness in justifying believers; and so are brought to realize habitually a judgment to come, as the whole tenor of revelation manifests to them, that the prince of this world, and all his subjects, lie under certain condemnation. When the Holy Spirit has thus prepared the hearts of sinners, (as he did those of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 37), "he glorifies Christ, and receives of the things of Christ, and shows unto them," (John xvi. 7—15). By his illuminating energy, by divesting the mind of proud and carnal prejudices, and by bringing the words of Scripture to their remembrance, he discovers to them the glory and excellence of Emmanuel's person, his infinite compassion and condescension, the perfection of his righteousness, the preciousness of his blood, the prevalence of his intercession, and the suitableness of his whole salvation. In proportion therefore as the sinner is abased and humbled in his own eyes, Christ becomes precious in his estimation; the Comforter exalts him in his heart; he perceives him to be "altogether lovely," "the pearl of great price," and that all things are but loss in comparison of him. Now he begins to see something of his unsearchable riches, his unfathomable love, his inexhaustible fulness; he finds that all he can want is comprised in a relation to, and interest in Christ, and in union and communion with him. His liberty, honour, pleasure, and felicity consist in having such a Saviour, brother, and friend; and those strains of admiring love, de-

Digitized by Google

sire, gratitude, and praise, which once appeared to him too rapturous, or even enthusiastic, become the genuine language of his most lively hours, and he knows that they are all far beneath his real excellency and glory: thus the love of Christ to him, and his reciprocal love to Christ, constrain him to live to his glory. And here we may observe, that in proportion as the doctrine of the Spirit is exploded or overlooked, the person and work of Christ are generally dishonoured; and whilst men plume themselves on a rational religion, they evidence, and sometimes must be conscious, that the language of Scripture does not suit their views, but far better accords to those of the enthusiasts, whom they so liberally vilify, and cordially despise. Is it not then evident, that the reason why Christ is no more glorified in the visible church, is simply this: men do not expect, depend on, or seek for the influences of the Holy Spirit *in this respect;* and therefore they are left to exalt themselves, or philosophy, or some favourite author, and to degrade the light of the world and the life of men?

Several of the apostle's prayers for his converts had respect, not to miraculous gifts, but to such things as are equally needful in every age. He desired, "that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation might enlighten their understandings to know God and the glory of his gospel, and cause them to experience the power of his grace," &c. (Eph. i. 17—19; iii. 16—21; 1 Cor. ii. 12; 2 Cor. iv. 3—6). Now, is it not necessary that all Christians should thus know God, understand the gospel and its privileges, and be inwardly strengthened in love and obedience to the Lord Jesus? Surely these are essentials to real Christianity in every age? And the state of the professing church of Christ, amidst all modern improvements, shows that they can no more be produced without the influences of the Spirit, than skill in agriculture can insure a crop of corn, without the influences of the sun and rain. The apostle says, "that the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, who is given unto us;" and whether we understand this of our knowledge of God's love to us, or of our exercise of love to him, it is manifest that we cannot attain to it, except by the influences of the Spirit, preparing and pervading all the faculties of our souls, (Rom. v. 5); and indeed all fervent affections towards God, or joy in him, are deemed enthusiasm by those who deny these doctrines; and a decent conduct, with a form of godliness, constitutes the sum total of *improved Christianity*. The same apostle prays, that the Romans "may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost," (Rom. xv. 17). Hope is one of those graces which abides in the church, (1 Cor. xiii. 13); and if this springs from, and abounds through the power of the Spirit, we must conclude, that all who are destitute of his influences are either "without hope," or buoyed up in presumptuous confidence. According to St. Peter, the believer's obedience results from "the sanctification of the Spirit." And he says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren," &c. (1 Pet. i. 2, 22). Surely these are duties of Christianity peculiar to no age or place; and the influences of the Spirit must be as needful to the performance of them at present, as when inspired apostles were the teachers of the church. "The kingdom of God is—in righteousness, peace, and *joy in the Holy Ghost.*" (Rom. xiv. 17): how then can we rejoice in the Lord always, without his blessed influences? But this subject is most copiously discussed in the eighth of Romans, which brevity forbids me to enlarge upon. Let it suffice in general to observe, that the apostle ascribes the believer's deliverance from "the law of sin and death," to "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18); and derives the *spiritual mind*, which "is life and peace," from the same source. They in whom "the Spirit of God dwells," are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit;" but "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" they, who "*through the Spirit* mortify the deeds of the body, shall live;" they "that are led," or willingly guided and influenced by him, "are the children of God." He dwells in them, not as a "spirit of bondage," to induce them to obey God from servile motives,

Digitized by Google

but as a Spirit of adoption, by whom they cry, "Abba, Father:" and thus, by producing filial dispositions and affections in their hearts, he witnesses with them, that they are the children and heirs of God. They have therefore, "the first-fruits of the Spirit," called elsewhere, the "seal of the Spirit," being the renewal of the Divine image on their souls, and the "earnest of the Spirit," or the beginning and sure pledge of heavenly felicity, (2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 13, 14; iv. 30). But who can deny that these things are essential to genuine Christianity at all times, and in all places? In short, we are directed to pray "in," or by "the Holy Ghost," who "also helpeth our infirmities;" and whatever words we use, his influences alone can render our worship spiritual. Our holy tempers, affections, and actions are called "the fruits of the Spirit, (Gal. v. 22, 23; Eph. v. 9), to distinguish them from mere moral conduct, on worldly or legal principles. We are said "to live, and to walk in, and to be filled with the Spirit;" and all our heavenly wisdom, knowledge, strength, holiness, joy; all things relative to our repentance, faith, hope, love, worship, obedience, meetness for heaven, and foretastes of it, are constantly ascribed to his influences; nor can we escape fatal delusions, resist temptations, overcome the world, or glorify God, except as we are taught, sanctified, strengthened, and comforted by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in believers, "as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."

We need not then wonder at the low ebb to which vital Christianity is fallen, when we consider how many nominal Christians utterly disclaim all dependence on the Spirit as enthusiasm; and how much this part of the gospel is overlooked by numbers who are zealous for other doctrines of it! The subject therefore suggests to us the vast importance of owning the divine person and whole work of the Spirit in all our services; of praying *for*, that we may pray *by* the Spirit, (Luke xi. 13); of applying for and depending on him in all things; of cautiously distinguishing his genuine influences from every counterfeit, by Scriptural rules; of avoiding those worldly cares, and that indolence, which "quench," and all those evil tempers, which "grieve the Spirit of God;" and of giving the glory of all the good wrought in or by us, to him, as the original source and author of it. Thus, depending on the mercy of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and the grace of the Spirit, we shall be prepared to give glory to the Triune God our Saviour, both now and for evermore.

ESSAY XV.

On the Uses of the Moral Law, in subserviency to the Gospel of Christ.

When we have duly considered our situation as fallen creatures, and those things that relate to our recovery by the mercy of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, we must perceive, that "we are saved by grace, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph. ii. 8—10). And we shall next be led to inquire, "wherefore, then, serveth the law?" (Gal. iii. 19). Indeed, the apostle introduces this question as the objection of a Judaizing teacher to the doctrines of grace. But, in stating the uses of the law as coincident with the doctrines before-mentioned, it is obvious, that neither the ritual law nor the legal dispensation are intended; the former typified, and the latter introduced, the clear revelation of the gospel, and they were both superseded and antiquated by the coming of Christ. The moral law alone is intended, which was originally written in the heart of man, as created in the image of God; was afterwards delivered with awful solemnity from Mount Sinai in ten commandments; is elsewhere summed up

Digitized by Google

two great commandments of loving God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves: and is explained and enlarged upon in a great variety of particular precepts throughout the whole Scripture. This law, besides what it more directly enjoins, implicitly requires us to love, admire, and adore every discovery that God shall please at any time to make to us of his glorious perfections; cordially to believe every truth he shall reveal and authenticate; and willingly to obey every positive appointment which he shall at any time be pleased to institute.

This law is immutable in its own nature; for it could not be abrogated, or altered, without an *apparent* intimation, that God was not so glorious, lovely, and excellent; or so worthy of all possible honour, admiration, gratitude, credit, adoration, submission, and obedience, as the law had represented him to be; or without *seeming* to allow, that man had at length ceased to be under those obligations to God, or to stand in those relations to him, and to his neighbour, whence the requirements of the law at first resulted. The moral law, I say, could not be changed in any essential point, unless we could cease to be under infinite obligations to our great Creator; unless he could allow us in some degree to be alienated from, and become despisers of him; or to love worldly objects and our own temporal advantage or pleasure, more than his infinite excellency, and to prefer them to his glory, and the enjoyment of his favour; unless he could allow us to be ungrateful for his benefits, to discredit his veracity, to dispute his authority, to reject the appointments of his wisdom; and to injure, neglect, corrupt, or hate one another, to the confusion and ruin of his fair creation. Such absurd and dreadful consequences may unanswerably be deduced, from the supposition of the moral law of God being repealed or altered; and they are the bane of every Antinomian or Neonomian invention, however ingeniously stated or diversified. The Lord may, consistent with the immutable perfections of his nature and righteousness of his government, reveal truths before unknown to his creatures; he may abrogate positive institutions, or appoint others; he may arrange various circumstances relative to the law, in a new manner, according to the different situations in which rational agents are placed: but the love of God with all the powers of the soul and the equal love of each other, must continue the indispensable duty of all reasonable creatures, however circumstanced, through all the ages of eternity.

This law is the foundation of the covenant of works; and it is the wisdom and duty of every holy creature to seek justification by obeying it: but for fallen men who are continually transgressing, to seek to be justified by their obedience to it, is absurd and arrogant in the greatest degree that can be conceived. This attempt is generally called *self-righteousness;* and all the preachers of Christianity are bound most decidedly to warn men against it as a fatal rock on which multitudes are continually perishing.

But what purposes then does the law answer, under a dispensation of mercy, and in subserviency to the doctrines and the covenant of grace? And what use should the ministers of the New Testament make of it? The following statement may perhaps contain a sufficient reply to these questions; and make way for some observations on the bad effects which follow from ignorance, inattention, or confused apprehensions respecting the moral law in the ministers and professors of the gospel.

I. The apostle says, "I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God," (Gal. ii. 19.) He doubtless meant (by "being dead to the law,") that he had entirely given up all hope and every thought of justification by the law, or of obtaining eternal life as the reward of his own obedience to it: and having fled to Christ for justification, he was delivered also from the fear of final condemnation by it. He had therefore no more to hope or fear from the law, than a man after his death hath to hope or fear from his friends or enemies. When he was a proud Pharisee, "he was alive without the law: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died," (Rom. vii. 9). And every impartial reader must see, that the apostle

Digitized by Google

there spoke of the moral law, which he called, spiritual, holy, just, and good, in which he "*delighted after the inner man*, and which he *served with his mind*," &c. And thus will every self-righteous Pharisee become dead to the law, in proportion as he knows and understands the nature of its requirements and sanction. When the sinner becomes well acquainted with the strictness, extensive demands, and awful denunciations of the law, his hope of being justified according to it must expire: for he will perceive, that it requires a perfectly holy heart, and a perfectly holy life; that it respects every imagination, intention, affection, disposition, motive, word, and work; that it demands absolute, uninterrupted, and perfect obedience from the first dawn of reason to the moment of death; and that it denounces an awful curse on "every one who continueth not in all things, written in its precepts, to do them." But unless the goodness or excellency of the law be also perceived, the sinner will not be brought to genuine self-abasement. A man may be clearly convicted of high treason according to the letter of the law; but if he thinks the law itself to be iniquitous, he will persist in justifying his conduct; and his sullen enmity to the prince, the government, and his judges, will probably increase in proportion as he sees the execution of the sentence denounced against him to be inevitable. If men only consider the strictness of the precept and the severity of the sanction of the divine law; hard thoughts of God will be excited, they will deem themselves justified in desponding inactivity, or they will take refuge in Antinomianism, or infidelity. But when every precept is shown to the conscience to be "holy, just, and good," requiring nothing but what is reasonable, equitable, and beneficial; namely, that we should resemble and imitate the Holy God, love supremely his infinite excellency, seek our happiness and liberty in his favour and service, be filled with gratitude for all his unspeakable goodness, employ all his gifts to his glory, love and do good to others for his sake, and thus share and aid the common felicity of all his obedient creatures: these views of the law strike at the root of man's self-admiration; the convinced sinner is thus constrained to take part with God, as it were, against himself, and can no longer withhold his approbation from the law, even whilst he knows himself liable to be condemned by it. For the more clearly the excellency of the precept is perceived, the more evidently do the odiousness, unreasonableness, and desert of sin appear. The law should, therefore, be very fully stated, explained and applied to the consciences of men for these purposes: for this constitutes the grand means which the Lord blesses, to show sinners in what the divine image consisted, after which Adam was created; and what they ought to have been, and to have done during the whole of their past lives; and to convince them that their sins have been exceedingly numerous and heinous in thought, word, and deed, by "leaving undone what they ought to have done, and doing what they ought not to have done;" that their present dispositions and supposed duties are vile and unworthy of God's acceptance, yea, deserving of his wrath and abhorrence; and in short, that their case is hopeless and helpless if they be left to themselves, under the old covenant, and dealt with according to the merit or demerit of their works. In this way the pride of mens' hearts is abased, their mouths are stopped, their false and legal confidence is destroyed, and they are prepared by the knowledge of, and humiliation for their sins, to understand and welcome the salvation of the gospel. Thus the law was delivered from Mount Sinai, to the nation of Israel to prepare their minds for the promises and types of good things to come; and it should thus be delivered from every pulpit, "as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."

II. The law is useful to illustrate the necessity, nature, and glory of redemption. The Lord is rich "in mercy," and "he delighted in mercy;" why then does he not pardon all sinners by a mere act of sovereign grace? What need was there of a Surety, a Redeemer, or an atonement? Why must God be manifest in the flesh? Why must Emmanuel agonize and die on the cross? Did ever an earthly prince require his beloved, his only, his

Digitized by Google

dutiful Son to endure the most intense tortures, previous to his pardoning any number of criminals? This could not be necessary in order to prevail with God to love and save us: for it is everywhere spoken of in Scripture as the most emphatical evidence and richest fruit of his love to us. But the Lord is infinitely holy in his nature, and righteous in his moral government; and he is determined "to magnify his law, and make it honourable." We had by our sins despised and dishonoured the holy law, and rendered ourselves obnoxious to the just vengeance of our Creator: if then he spared us, his holiness, justice and law would be disgraced, or at least the glory of them obscured; unless some other decisive method were taken of magnifying his law, displaying his justice, and filling the world with awful astonishment at his holy hatred of sin. Whilst he, therefore, makes these things known by the final misery of some transgressors, he pardons others, to the praise of his glorious grace; but in such a way as still more effectually secures the honour of his law and government. "He hath set forth his own Son to be a propitiation for sin, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth." They who really believe and understand the Scriptural account of this surprising transaction, see the necessity of this redemption, perceive somewhat of its nature, and discover the glory of God as peculiarly displayed in it: to others, the "preaching of the cross is foolishness." But the more fully men are acquainted with the strictness and excellency of the requirements, and the justice of the sanction of the Divine law; the more easily and clearly will they apprehend the necessity, nature, and glory of this wonderful expedient "to magnify it, and make it honourable."

III. The law is useful as a rule of conduct to believers. When we flee for refuge to Christ by faith, we are delivered from the curse of the law, and from the legal covenant; but we remain subjects of God's moral government, and are bound to obedience by new and most endearing obligations. God forbid, that "we should sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace:" yet there is no other rule of duty and sin, but the moral law as above defined, and "where no law is, there is no transgression." Christ says to his disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" and having expounded, in the most strict and spiritual manner, the precepts of the moral law, he says, "he that breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of God," &c. (Matt. v. 19); and his apostles continually refer to the law, as the rule of the believer's conduct, (Rom. xiii. 8—10: Gal. v. 13, 14; Eph. vi. 2; Jam. ii. 8—13; iv. 11, 12; 1 John iii. 4); for "we are not without law to God, but under the law to Christ," (1 Cor. ix. 21): and as the precepts given by our Lord are the same in substance with those of the moral law, (though enforced by new motives and encouragements); so the believer receives the law, deprived of its condemning power from the hand of the Redeemer, as the rule by which to regulate his conduct, to the honour of the gospel, and the glory of God. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." He who greatly loves the Divine Saviour, will not only be ready to show that love in his whole conduct; but he will also desire to know what his Lord would have him to do, that "his love may abound in knowledge and in all judgment," and that he may be wise in understanding "what the will of the Lord is:" and as there can be no authorized standard and rule of the Lord's will, except his commandments, so that Christian who best understands them will be most completely furnished for every good work, provided his knowledge of the truths and promises of Scripture be equally clear and comprehensive.

IV. The law is very useful to believers, as the test or touchstone of their sincerity. It is written in the heart of all true Christians by the Holy Spirit, (Jer. xxxi. 33; Heb. viii. 10); they all "delight in it after the inner man," "consent to it that it is good," "count all God's commandments in all things to be right," "love and choose all his precepts," repent of, and mourn for every sin as a transgression of the law, are grieved and burdened

Digitized by Google

because they "cannot do the things that they would," and long to love God and man as perfectly as the law requires. The fruits of the Spirit, by which their deliverance from the law as a covenant is sealed, are coincident with the requirements of its holy precepts; the example of Christ, which they are called and inclined to imitate, consisted in a perfect obedience to the holy law; the holiness which they follow after, is no other than conformity to it, as resulting from evangelical principles, and a constant regard to the Redeemer's person, and their obligations to him; and the heavenly felicity is the perfection of this conformity, the full enjoyment of God, as the supreme object of their love: and the delight of sharing the happiness of all holy creatures, by loving and being loved by them, without envy, suspicion, fear, or the alloy of any other base and selfish passion. But "the carnal mind," (whether in an infidel, a careless sinner, a Pharisee, or a hypocrite) "is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." All unregenerate men, therefore, at least secretly dislike the strictness and spirituality of the law, and wish to have it abrogated or mitigated: this secret inclination of the heart is the source of all Antinomian principles, and in this respect persons of the most opposite sentiments resemble each other; for virulent opposers, and loose abusers, of the doctrines of grace, are alike influenced, both by the pride of self-confidence, and by the enmity to the law, which distinguishes the Antinomian. But, on the other hand, the true believer approves of the very precept, that condemns his own conduct, and longs to have his own heart changed into conformity to the holy commandment. If then professors of the gospel were more fully acquainted with the requirements of the Divine law, they would be far less exposed to the danger of deceiving themselves; and sincere believers would more clearly perceive, that their mourning for, and hatred of sin, tenderness of conscience, and uneasy longings after higher degrees of holiness, than any of which they once had the least conception, constitute a "witness in themselves," of their actual union with Christ, and of their interest in all the blessings of the new covenant. At the same time a more distinct view of the justice of that awful sentence from which Christ hath redeemed them with his own blood, would, in proportion to their assurance of deliverance, and hope of eternal life, animate them to live more entirely devoted to his service, who died for them and rose again, (2 Cor. v. 14, 15).

V. The knowledge of the law is exceedingly useful to believers, as a standard of continual self-examination, to exclude spiritual pride, and to keep the soul always abased, and simply dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge, gifts, usefulness, or any other attainment by which men are distinguished from those around them, have a tendency to excite self-complacency, and self-preference: but when a believer comes to compare the state of his heart, and the very duties and services he performs, with the spiritual and holy commands of God; he is reminded of his guilt and depravity, and taught his constant need of repentance, forgiveness, the blood of Christ, and the supplies of his grace. Thus he learns to walk humbly before God, however distinguished among men; to be ashamed of such good works as he would otherwise admire; to count even his evangelical duties as dross in comparison of Christ and his righteousness; to be simple in his dependence on the Lord in all things; and knowing that he hath not attained, "to press forward to the mark, for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

It now remains for us to consider the bad effects which arise from ignorance, inattention, or confused apprehensions respecting the moral law, in the ministers and professors of the gospel. We suppose then that the several doctrines of the gospel are stated and apprehended as fully as they can be, when the perfect law of God is greatly kept out of sight: for this must create some confusion and inconsistency in the best arranged system of evangelical doctrine. We observe also, that there are various degrees and kinds of ignorance and inattention to the law, or of a confused and unscriptural way of speaking about it. Some persons seem almost to leave it out of their

Digitized by Google

system, or only to speak of it in depreciating terms; others advert to its strictness and severity, but they are not equally sensible of its excellency. Many are acquainted with its uses, in convincing men of sin, but not of its value as a rule of conduct; others, on the contrary, apply its precepts to the regulation of the Christian's conduct, but are less habituated to use them to alarm the consciences of unbelievers. But in proportion as any of these uses are neglected, some or other of the following effects may be apprehended.

1. Great numbers of those that hear and assent to the gospel, will remain destitute of any serious concern about their souls. Whatever men learn of Christ and his love, or free salvation; they seldom count him the pearl of great price, and consent to part with all for his sake, till they are made deeply sensible of their danger as lost, perishing sinners. We must not indeed limit the Spirit of God: yet "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" and a full acquaintance with its demands and sanctions is the more general means, by which the careless are warned to flee from the wrath to come, and to see and feel their need of the salvation of the gospel.

2. Ignorance of, or inattention to the law, always occasions the prevalence or increase of a legal or self-righteous spirit. This propensity of our proud hearts is first broken by perceiving in some measure how justly and certainly the law of God condemns even our best actions; because they are so defective in their motive and measure, and so defiled in themselves: and were we always influenced by a realizing conviction, that "God deems us deserving of damnation for not loving him with all our hearts;" our proneness to rely on our own works could not subsist, but we must draw all our confidence from the grace of the gospel. All other devices for curing this disease are mere palliatives: but the apostle directs us to the radical cure, when he says, "I through the law, am dead to the law."

3. Ignorance of, or errors about, the holy commandments of God, gives occasion to the increase of unsound professors of the gospel, whose scandalous lives, or awful apostacies, often disgrace the cause of truth. For if men are left to consider the law as an enemy, from which Christ came to deliver us; if they conclude, that their natural dislike to it is excusable, their inability to keep it a misfortune, and their condemnation for breaking it a hard case; if they suppose salvation to consist almost wholly in deliverance from condemnation, and do not in the least perceive that all true believers really repent of, and condemn themselves for breaking the law, are taught to love and delight in it, and are both required and inclined to testify the sincerity of their love by unreserved obedience to all its precepts, they will readily embrace a doctrine which gives relief to their uneasy consciences, and leaves the favourite lusts of their hearts unmolested. Thus stony-ground hearers, who welcome the gospel with impenitent joy, and then in time of temptation fall away; and thorny-ground hearers, who retain an unfruitful profession, with a worldly, covetous, or sensual life, will abound in the visible church, and be as Achans in the camp. No care indeed of man can wholly prevent this: but a clear and distinct view of the holy law of God, and its subserviency to the gospel, is one very important means of preventing such dreadful delusions, and such wide-spreading scandals.

4. The prevalence of corrupt and heretical principles originates from the same source. Perhaps it might be shown, that all anti-scriptural schemes of religion coincide in several particulars. They agree in considering the perfect law of God as too strict in its demands, and too severe in its penalty; and in supposing that it would be inconsistent with the Divine justice and goodness to deal with his rational creatures according to it. None of them allow expressly, that Christ died to *honour this law*, and to satisfy the justice of God for our transgressions of it that he might save sinners, without seeming to favour sin: but they suppose his death to have been designed exclusively for some other purposes. Nor do any of them consider a total change of nature and disposition to be absolutely necessary to salvation; but all of

Digitized by Google

them explain regeneration to mean something very different from, and far beneath this new creation unto holiness. They who differ and dispute the most about other points, when their sentiments are carefully examined, are found to harmonize in these particulars. The philosophical Socinian who rejects the doctrine of the atonement as needless, and the eternity of future punishment as unjust, here joins issue with the Antinomian or Enthusiast; who, boasting of free grace and extraordinary illuminations, reviles and tramples on the law, which Christ died to magnify and honour. Almost all errors in religion connect with misapprehensions about the law of God; therefore ignorance, inattention, and confused views of it, must tend exceedingly to favour the propagation of heretical opinions of various kinds. A few instances may be mentioned. It would not be so common, as far as we can see, for those who have been educated in evangelical principles, to diverge into Arian or Socinian sentiments, if a deep and clear knowledge of the demands, excellency, and uses of the law were connected with their views of human depravity, redemption, justification, and regeneration, to assist them in understanding the real nature and necessity of the great doctrines of salvation. For want of this, when they are pressed by reasonings on such subjects, they know not what to answer, and so give up the truth as untenable on rational grounds; instead of perceiving that it has its foundation in the nature of things, in the Divine perfections, and in our condition as transgressors, and as creatures continually propense to transgress. We can hardly conceive that men professing godliness could ever have fancied themselves perfectly free from all sin, and so have been seduced into a most disgraceful and injurious kind of self-preference and spiritual pride; if they had previously been well-grounded in the knowledge of the extensive demands of the Divine law. The Mystic who places the whole of his religion on the internal feelings of his mind, or what he calls the voice or the moving of the Spirit; whilst the doctrine of the atonement, the life of faith in a crucified Saviour, the written word, and the means of grace, are contemptuously disregarded by him; and the Antinomian who is satisfied with what Christ has done for him, and perceives no want of a renovation to the Divine image, or a personal holiness of heart and life; must alike stand confuted, if the real nature, excellency, and uses of the holy law were clearly discovered to them. But where this is overlooked, one of these perversions of the gospel will insinuate itself, and prey insensibly on the vitals of true religion, whatever attempts be made to exclude or eradicate it.

5. Through ignorance of the law, real Christians habitually neglect duties, or give way to evil tempers, &c., to the discredit of the gospel, or to the hinderance of their own fruitfulness, comfort, and growth in grace. It has frequently happened that ministers have heard some of their people acknowledge, after receiving practical instructions, that they had not before been sensible that such or such things were sins, or that this or the other was a duty incumbent on them: nay, the meditation on such subjects has sometimes the same effect on the ministers themselves. The knowledge of the precepts, therefore, is the proper method of rendering believers complete in the will of God, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and in bringing them to walk worthy of God unto all well-pleasing: and consequently inattention to it must proportionably produce the contrary effects.

6. Lastly, The Scriptures enlarge in commendation of the Divine commandments, and in exhorting men to abound in, and be zealous of good works; but many who profess or preach evangelical truth, speak very little on these subjects, except in an unguarded, depreciating manner: hence additional prejudices are excited in mens' minds against the doctrines of grace, as subversive of holy practice. But if the nature, use, excellency, and necessity of good works as the fruits and evidences of true faith were more fully understood; and the preceptive part of the Bible, in subserviency to the gospel were more prominent in mens' discourse and conduct, such objections would be confuted; and they would be put to shame, who should falsely accuse either our holy doctrine or good conversation in Christ Jesus.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVI.

On the Believer's Warfare and Experience.

THE sacred Scriptures always represent the true Christian as a soldier, engaged in an arduous warfare with potent enemies, against whom he is supported, and over whom he is made victorious by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, through faith in and obedience to the Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation. But such expressions as *fighting* or *striving*, with other allusions to military affairs, imply an experience essentially different from that of those persons who never engage in the conflict, or who have already obtained the conqueror's palm: nor can any hope, or even assurance of victory and triumph, or any intervening seasons of peace and joy, entirely preclude this difference. The distinction, therefore, between the church *militant* on earth, and the church *triumphant* in heaven, hath on good grounds been established; and they who do not well understand and consider it, will be very liable to fall into several injurious, discouraging, disgraceful, or even fatal mistakes. In discussing the subject, we may first offer some reflections on the distinguishing principles, purposes, and desires of the persons who are engaged in this warfare:—we may next enumerate the enemies with whom especially they are called to contend:—we may briefly mention the encouragements, supports, and aids vouchsafed them; the weapons with which they fight, and the manner in which they must put on and use their armour:—we may then advert to the nature and effects of their victories; and then conclude with a few hints on the appropriate experience that must result from their situation.

We do not then speak, in this place, of the whole multitude who are called Christians, or who are historical believers of the scriptures; neither do we include all who would subscribe or dispute for the several doctrines that constitute the grand peculiarities of the Christian faith; nor would we be understood to mean the whole company who compose any peculiar sect or denomination, to the exclusion of others. Alas! in all these respects, strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it; for but few "strive," or wrestle, "to enter in" (Mat. vii. 13, 14; Luke xiii. 23—30.) A vast majority continue "to hold the truth in unrighteousness," "to walk according to the course of this world," and to "serve divers lusts and pleasures," &c. Many of them, indeed, observe Gamaliel's cautious advice, and are not openly united with those, "who fight against God:" but then, they aim to observe an impracticable and inadmissible neutrality, and know nothing of fighting under the banner of Christ against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and of being his faithful soldiers to the end of their lives; unless they have read or heard of it, in the form of baptism, or have been taught any thing about it, from some orthodox catechism. The persons, of whom this Essay treats, are those of every name, who, by obeying the truth, have been "made free from sin, and become the servants of God;" most of them remember well the time, when "they were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus iii. 3—7:) but "God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love, wherewith he loved them, even when they were dead in sin, hath quickened them" (Eph. ii. 1—10;) and thus "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," they were enlightened to see something of the glory of God, the evil of sin, the value and danger of their souls, and their need of mercy, grace, and salvation. They were effectually warned to flee from the wrath to come, and led to repent and turn to God, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to renounce their

Digitized by Google

former hopes of justification before God by their own merits, and to believe in Christ, that they might be justified by faith: and having experienced the work of the Holy Spirit, "as glorifying Christ" in their hearts, and showing them those things that relate to his person, love, redemption, and salvation; they have learned "to count all but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ;" they are prepared to deny themselves, bear the cross, labour, venture, suffer, and part with all for his sake; and "the love of Christ constrains them to live no longer to themselves, but to him," and to the glory of his name. In this manner "they are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God;" they separate from his enemies, and join themselves to his friends; they throw down the arms of their rebellion, and "put on the whole armour of God:" they deliberately enlist under the banner of Christ; consider his people, cause, and honour as their own, and his enemies within and around them as equally hostile to them also. Under the conduct of divine grace, these consecrated warriors strive against sin, seeking the destruction of the kingdom of Satan in their hearts and in the world as far as their influence can reach; and do not, when most themselves, so much as entertain one thought of making any peace or truce with the enemies of Christ and of their souls. Holiness (or conformity to the law, and moral perfections of God,) they deem the health and liberty, and sin, the disease, bondage, and misery of their souls: they regard themselves as bound by the strongest and most endearing obligations, to devote themselves wholly to their God and Saviour; they esteem the interests of evangelical truth and vital godliness as of the utmost importance to the happiness of mankind; and they expect their present comfort, as well as their future felicity, from communion with God and enjoyment of his favour.

But various inward and outward impediments and obstructions combine to counteract these desires, and to prevent their principles from entirely producing those effects, which might otherwise be expected from them: and whilst these principles struggle as it were to exert themselves, notwithstanding this opposition, a conflict ensues, to the experience of which all rational creatures in the universe, who are not thus circumstanced, must of course remain strangers: even as none, but soldiers in actual service, experience the dangers, hardships, and sufferings of a military life. The regenerate person as *really* loves God, and desires to obey, honour, worship, and please him, and for his sake to act properly towards his brethren, as angels in heaven do: and at those times, when his heart is enlarged in holy contemplations, he longs to be perfectly holy, obedient, and spiritual; then the principles of the new man vigorously exert themselves; and the remains of corrupt nature, or the old man, lie comparatively dormant: the world is greatly out of sight, or stripped of its attractions; and the enemies of his soul are restrained from assaulting him. But when the Christian hath left his closet, or the house of God, and is returned to the employments of his station in life; he finds himself unable to realize his previous views, or to accomplish the purposes which he most uprightly formed; and he often wonders to find himself so different a person, from what he was a few hours before. Yet this also is only partial and temporary: the better principles implanted in his soul, counteract and prevent the effect of corrupt passions and external objects: and shortly they again resume a more decided ascendancy: so that upon the whole, he successfully opposes sin, asserts his liberty, and serves God: and his state is determined by this habitual prevalence of heavenly principles; for "he walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This conflict may easily be perceived to be a very different thing from the feeble and occasional interruption, which an unregenerate man sometimes experiences, in following the habitual inclinations of his heart; these arise only from convictions of conscience, fear of consequences, or selfish hopes; the man's desires and affections are wholly fixed on carnal things; of *spiritual* good he cannot properly be said to have so much as one just idea;

Digitized by Google

and religion is his task, of which he performs no more than what his fears or hopes impose upon him: yet these are often confounded together, and this produces much mischief. But the enemies, with whom the Christian soldier is called to encounter, must be more precisely ascertained, if we would fully understand the important subject. The apostle having declared, that "the flesh lusteth against the spirit," &c.; proceeds to show what are the works of the flesh, and the fruits of the spirit (Gal. v. 17—23:) by which it is evident, that *the flesh* signifies our whole nature (as born of Adam's fallen race,) with all its propensities, animal and intellectual, as they are contrary to the spiritual commands of God; and that "*the spirit*" signifies the work of the Holy Spirit, renewing our souls to holiness, and so teaching, disposing, and enabling us to love and serve God. "For that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

If we then proceed to examine the nature of man, we shall find that a disposition to depart from God, and idolatrously to love and seek felicity from the creatures, is common to our whole species: and from this general principle, according to different mens' constitutions, education, habits, connections, or circumstances, some are more propense to avarice, some to ambition, some to sensual indulgence, and others to malignant passions with every possible variation. These propensities being excited by temptation, gathering force by gratification, triumphing over shame and conscience, and irritated by the interference of those who pursue the same objects, hurry men into every kind of excess, burst forth into all the variety of crimes that have prevailed in every age and nation, and produce all kinds of immorality in mens' conduct towards each other, and all impiety, blasphemy, and other daring offences against the Almighty Governor of the Universe. And as *he* best knows the strength of a torrent, who attempts to force his way against it; so none are so well acquainted with the power of corrupt propensities, and habits, as they that resolutely endeavour to overcome and extirpate them. When, therefore, holy principles have been implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God, and a man sees the urgent necessity and feels the ardent desire "of crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts," then his conflict begins; for pride, anger, envy, malice, avarice, or sensual lusts being no longer allowed to domineer, abide (like a dethroned tyrant,) and have a strong party in the soul; and consequently they oppose and counteract the best desires and purposes of the believer, and engage him in a perpetual contest. At some times they find him off his guard, and gain a temporary advantage over him, which makes work for deep repentance; and at all times they impede his progress, mingle pollution in his services, and interrupt his endeavours to glorify God and adorn the gospel. These things are generally most painfully experienced in respect of those sins, which by any means had previously acquired the ascendancy over him, and in proportion to the degree in which he remits watchfulness and prayer: but even those evil propensities from which a man before thought himself most free, will be found on trial to possess great power in his soul.

The apostle gives us a very particular account of the believer's conflict with these enemies, (Rom. vii;) for I think we may be confident that no man, except the true believer, "delights in the law of God," "serves it with his mind," "hates all sin," and "has a will" to every part of the spiritual service of God: nor can we suppose that St Paul would say, "I myself," if he meant another person of an opposite character; or use the present tense throughout, if he referred to his experience in an unconverted state. Now the whole of the passage most aptly describes the case of a man who loves God and his service, and would obey and glorify him, as angels do: but finds the remainder of evil propensities and habits continually impeding, and often prevailing against him; but who still resolutely maintains the combat with these enemies of his soul, as determined if possible entirely to extirpate them; and at the same time feels his heart more pained by the opposition made by his sins to the best desires of his heart, than by all his

Digitized by Google

persecutions or afflictions; and yet rejoices in the mercy and grace of the gospel, and in the prospect of complete and final deliverance.

Indeed all the falls, defects, complaints, rebukes, chastenings, confessions, &c., of believers in every part of Scripture, imply the same conflict; and seeing that we do not read of any one, who explicitly spoke of himself, or was spoken of by others, as free from all remains of sin, and made perfect in holiness, or as having accomplished his warfare whilst he lived in this world; so we must conclude, that those persons are in this respect deceived, or use words without a proper attention to their meaning, who now profess to have attained to this kind of perfection. If the inward enemy were quite slain, and we could in this sense adopt the words of Christ, "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me," the rest of our conflict would be comparatively easy; but whilst this cause still subsists, we must expect at times to have our joys interrupted by sighs and groans, and tears and trembling, till we are removed to a better world.

But "we wrestle not against flesh and blood" only, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world," &c. (Eph. vi. 10—18.) The Scriptures continually lead our thoughts to these invisible enemies, fallen angels, or evil spirits. A kingdom of darkness and iniquity is spoken of, as established under Satan, the arch-apostate, consisting of vast numbers of his associates in rebellion: these differ in capacity and influence; but are all replete with pride, enmity, envy, deceit, and every detestable propensity; and their natural sagacity and powers are increased by long experience in the work of destruction. The entrance of sin by Adam's fall is ascribed to their ambition, envy, malice, and subtlety: ungodly men are uniformly considered as their slaves, yea, as their children. Satan is called the god and prince of this world: this old serpent deceiveth the nations, yea, the whole world; and he taketh sinners captive at his will. Conversion is stated to be "turning from Satan to God." This adversary, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour; and he transforms himself into an angel of light to deceive the unwary. The whole company of evil spirits are represented as counteracting by every possible effort, the endeavours of the Lord's servants to promote his cause; as harassing those by their temptations, whom they cannot destroy; and as desiring to sift and assault them: they are said to put all kinds of wickedness into mens' hearts, to fill their hearts; and to be the original authors of all heresies, persecutions, delusions, and apostacies; and in short, to work in the children of disobedience, (1 Kings xxii. 22—24; Job i. 7—12; Luke xxii. 31; John viii. 44; xiii. 2; xiv. 30; Acts v. 3; xxvi. 18; 2 Cor. iv. 4; xi. 14; 2 Tim. ii. 26; 1 John iii. 10; Rev. xii. 9, 10; xx. 2, 3, 7—10.) As, therefore, the Scriptures speak so plainly on this subject, we must ascribe it wholly to the subtlety of the devil (who prospers most when least suspected) that the Sadducean spirit of the age hath so much discarded the language of the oracles of God, and hath prevailed so far to bring this doctrine into contempt. Thus self-wise men are outwitted by these sagacious deceivers, and then are employed by them to delude others also into a fatal security. Were it not for the depravity of our hearts, these enemies would not have so much power against us; and their suggestions do not excuse the sins which we *voluntarily* commit: but as they prevail to deceive the world in general, so believers must expect to have a sharp conflict with them; not only as they act by their servants (such as infidels, persecutors, false teachers, scorners, flatterers, calumniators, seducers, &c.,) but immediately by their suggestions and assaults. They seem especially to have access to the imagination, where they present such illusions as excite the corrupt affections of the heart, or impose upon the understanding: they draw men into error, by stirring up their pride, prejudices, and lusts, which darken and confuse the judgment: they often present such thoughts to the mind as fill it with gloom and dejection, or with distressing doubts and hard thoughts of God, and by suggesting such things as the soul abhors; and by all means they induce men to neglect

Digitized by Google

means of grace, duties, or the improvement of their talents. But enough has been said to show, that we are called to conflict with evil spirits, who know where we are most vulnerable, and when most off our guard; whose *fiery darts* are as suited to excite our passions, as the spark is to kindle the most inflammable materials; who constantly aim to deceive, defile, discourage, or impede our course; and with whom we must expect every day to wrestle, though some are comparatively *evil* days, when they have peculiar advantages in assaulting us.

The believer is also engaged in an arduous conflict with this evil world, which is Satan's grand engine in all his stratagems and assaults. He uses the things of the world as his baits, or proposed premiums, by which to allure men to disobedience. "All," or some of "these will I give thee," is still one grand argument in his temptations. Nor is this only the case when the conduct suggested is evil in itself, and wealth, honour, or pleasure is annexed to it; but more commonly he prevails by seducing us into an inexpedient or excessive use or pursuit of worldly things. Thus ambushments are concealed in every business, connection, relation, recreation, or company; and the world prevails against us by inducing us to waste our time, to mispend what is entrusted to us, and to omit opportunities of usefulness. Moreover, what we call the evil things of the world are employed by Satan, to deter us from the profession of our faith, and the performance of our duty: thus many are seduced into sinful compliances, and led to renounce or dissemble their religion, lest they should be ridiculed, reproached, forsaken of their friends, or exposed to hardships and persecutions; and then they flatter themselves that this *prudence* will enable them to do the more good, till the event confutes the vain imagination. Near relations, beloved friends, liberal benefactors, admired superiors, as well as powerful opposers, are often dangerous foes in this respect. Riches and poverty, youth and old age, reputation and authority, or the contrary, have their several snares; whilst politeness and rude insolence, company and retirement, assault the soul in different ways. These few hints may show, in what the believer's conflict consists, and to what continual dangers it must expose him.

When, indeed, we seriously consider the variety of those obstacles which interrupt our course, the number, power, and malice of our enemies, the sinfulness and treachery of our own hearts, our weakness, and our exposed condition; we may well say, "who is sufficient for these things?" Or what hope is there of success in this unequal contest? But a proper attention to the Scriptures will convince us that there is no ground for despondency, or even for discouragement: as the Lord assures us, that he will strengthen, assist, and uphold us, and never forsake his redeemed people. We ought not, therefore, to fear our enemies; because he will be with us; "and if God be for us, who can be against us?" Or who can doubt, but he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world? And this was typically intimated in the promises made to Israel, in respect of their wars with the Canaanites and other nations, which were shadows and figures of the good fight of faith, (Exod. xiv. 14; Deut. vii. 17, 18; Josh. x. 25, 40: 1 Sam. xiv. 6; 2 Chron. xiv. 11; Isa. xli. 10—15; liv. 15—17.) We are, therefore, exhorted "to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" for "they that wait on the Lord, renew their strength;" and Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength, is become our salvation. All power in heaven and earth is vested in the Lord our Righteousness: he is head over all things to his church; and his servants have always found, that in proportion as they simply trusted in him, "they could do all things;" and that "when they were weak, then were they strong;" for the "power of Christ rested upon them," (2 Cor. xii. 9—11; Phil. v. 13.) He restrains and moderates as he sees good, the assaults of our outward enemies, or confounds their devices, and defeats their deep-laid machinations; all providential dispensations are directed by him, nor can any tribulation or temptation exceed the bounds he assigns them, though all the powers of earth and hell should combine against one feeble

Digitized by Google

saint: whilst the Holy Spirit communicates strength to our faith, fear, love, hope, patience, and every principle of the new man; imparts strong consolations and heavenly joys; effectually restrains the energy of corrupt passions, and disposes us to self-denial, to bear the cross, to persevere in well-doing, and to dread sin, and separation from Christ, or even dishonouring him, more than any other evil that can befal us. Supported, strengthened, and encouraged in this manner, believers have in every age been enabled "to fight the good fight of faith," and to "overcome every foe by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and have not loved their lives unto the death," (Rev. xii. 11.) Nay, they have generally acquitted themselves most honourably when their adversaries were most formidable, and their temptations apparently most invincible; because they were then most simply dependent on, and most fervent in praying for the all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus, and most stedfast in contemplating his sufferings and the glory that followed.

In order to maintain this conflict with good hope of success, we must take to ourselves and "put on the whole armour of God." Conscious sincerity in our profession of the gospel must be "as the girdle of our loins," without which we shall be entangled and embarrassed in all our conduct; an habitual obedient regard to our Lord's commands, as the rule of righteousness must be our breast-plate, in facing our foes: whilst a distinct knowledge, and cordial reception of the "gospel of peace," and the way of access, pardon, reconciliation, and acceptance in the divine Saviour, must be "the shoes of our feet," our only effectual preparation for firmly standing our ground, or comfortably marching to meet our assailants. Above all, *faith* or a firm belief of the truths, and reliance on the promises of God, must be our "shield," with which we may ward off and extinguish the "fiery darts of Satan," and prevent their fatal effects: *hope* of present support and heavenly felicity must be as a helmet to cover our head in the day of battle; and with the plain testimonies, precepts, promises, and instructions of the word of God, as "with the sword of the Spirit," we must (after our Lord's example) repel the tempter, and so resist him, that he may flee from us (Eph. vi. 10—18; 1 Thess. v. 5, 6.) In short, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal:" worldly wisdom, philosophical reasonings, and our own native strength and resolution (like Saul's armour, when put upon David,) can only encumber us: but when conscious of our weakness and unworthiness, and distrusting our own hearts, we "strive against sin, looking unto Jesus," relying on his power, truth, and grace, and observing his directions; when we aim to do his will, to seek his glory, and copy his example; then indeed we are armed for the battle: and however men may despise our weapons (as Goliath did David the shepherd with his staff, his sling, and stones,) we shall not be put to shame in the event, but shall be made more than conquerors over every inward and outward foe. This armour is prepared in Christ "our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" and in "his fulness of grace:" we take it to ourselves by "the prayer of faith," by searching and meditating on the Scriptures, and attendance on the means of grace: by watchfulness, sobriety, habitual circumspection and caution, &c., we put it on and keep it bright: and thus we are continually prepared for the conflict, and not liable to be surprised at unawares, or to fall into the ambushments of our vigilant enemies, (Matt. xxvi. 41; Luke xxi. 34—36; Rom. xiii. 11—14; 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.) And when we live at peace with our brethren, and pray for, warn, counsel, and encourage them also; we fight the good fight, as a part of the great army which is enlisted under the Redeemer's standard, to wage war against sin, the world, and the powers of darkness.

As far as we are enabled in this manner successfully to oppose our own corrupt passions, and various temptations, we gain victories which afford us present comforts, lively hopes, and discoveries of the Lord's love to our souls; and hereafter "glory, honour, and immortality." Our captain assures every one of his soldiers of this inestimable recompense; and if they are slain in

Digitized by Google

the conflict, this will only put them more speedily in possession of the conqueror's crown. In respect of others, our warfare is directed to the encouragement and help of our fellow-soldiers; the salvation (not the destruction) of our fellow-sinners; the benefit of all around us; and above all, the honour of our divine Saviour, by the spread of his gospel among men. Our bold profession of the truth, our exemplary conduct, expansive benevolence, fervent prayers, improvement of talents, and unremitted attention to the duties of our several stations, with quietness and prudence, as well as zeal, promote these ends: the religion of Jesus is thus continued from age to age, by the conversion of sinners to the faith: and though the seed of the serpent still bruises the Redeemer's heel in the sufferings of his people, yet Satan is, as it were, put under the feet of every true Christian at death, and Christ will at length finally and completely crush his head, whilst all his faithful soldiers shall attend his triumphs and share his glory.

It must appear from this compendious view of our conflicts, that all who are really engaged in them, experience a variety of changing emotions in their minds, to which others remain entire strangers. They must often mourn their ill success, or that of the common cause, or rejoice in the advantages attained or hoped for. Sometimes they will be ashamed and alarmed, by being baffled; and at others they will resume courage and return to the conflict. They will always come far short of that entire victory over their appetites, passions, and temptations, to which they aspire; they cannot therefore be so calm as indifference would render them. Much self-denial must be required in such a case, and perpetual fears of being surprised by the enemy. Yet their very alarms, tears, groans, and complaints, are evidences that they are Christ's disciples: their joys (with which a stranger intermeddleth not) far more than counterbalance their sorrows, and they can often triumph in the assured hope of final victory and felicity, even amidst the hardships and sufferings of the field of battle.

ESSAY XVII.

On the Privileges Enjoyed by the True Believer.

THE sacred oracles continually teach us, that the upright servant of God, (notwithstanding his mourning for sin, and all his conflicts, fears, chastenings and tribulations) is favoured and happy above all other men, even in this present world; for when the apostle observed, that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable," he only meant, that if a Christian could be deprived of the *hope* of heaven, and all those earnests, consolations, and lively affections which result from it, his peculiar trials, his tenderness of conscience, his antipathy to sin, and his thirstings after God and holiness, would be superadded to the ordinary burthens of life, without any proportionable counterpoise to them. But as this is not, and cannot be the case, so the Christian, with the hope of glory, and his other peculiar privileges, may be, and actually is, in proportion to his diligence and fruitfulness, of all men the most happy. In order to evince this truth, it may be useful to appropriate this Essay to the consideration of the most distinguished privileges of the real Christian, which no other man in the world can share with him, for they constitute "a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not;" "the *secret* of the Lord, which is with them that fear him," (Psal. xxv. 14: Prov. xiv. 10; Rev. ii. 17.) And it may be premised, that a disposition, supremely to desire, and diligently to seek after *all* these blessings as the felicity in which our souls delight, and with which they are satisfied, is one grand evidence that we are actually interested in them.

Digitized by Google

I. Every real Christian is actually pardoned and justified in the sight of God: and "blessed is the man whose trangression is forgiven," &c. (Psal. xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 6—8). Among a number of condemned criminals, that man would be deemed the happiest who had obtained the king's pardon, though others were more accomplished, or better clothed; for he would expect, in cheerful hope, the opening of his prison door, to set him at liberty from his confinement, and to restore him to the comforts of life; and this hope would render the temporary hardships of his situation more tolerable: whereas the rest would dread the hour when they were to be brought out of their cells to an ignominious and agonizing execution, which prospect would add to the gloom and horror of the dungeon. We are all criminals: death terminates our confinement in this vile body, and this evil world: at that important moment, the pardoned sinner goes to heaven, the unpardoned sinner drops into hell; and, except as the one has his views darkened by temptation, or by a fatherly rebuke for his misconduct; or, as the other has his fears obviated by infidelity, or dissipated by intoxicating pleasures and pursuits, the very thought of this closing scene, and its most interesting consequences, must have a vast effect upon the inward feelings of their minds, during the uncertain term of their remaining lives. Nothing can be more evident, than that the Scripture declares the sins of all believers to be actually pardoned, and their persons completely justified. "There is," says the apostle, "no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," (Rom. viii. 1, 33, 34); "for who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, whom he justifieth? Or who shall condemn those for whom Christ died and rose again," &c. And our Lord not only assures us, that "he who believeth is not condemned," but also that "he *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation," (John iii. 14—21; v. 24). The same privilege was proposed to the Old Testament church, when the prophet, stating repentance and conversion as the concomitants and evidences of true faith, declares in the name of Jehovah, "that if the wicked man will turn from all his sins, and do that which is lawful and right—all his transgressions that he hath done shall not *be mentioned to him*," &c. (Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, 27). In other places the Lord speaks of "blotting out the sins of his people, and remembering them no more;" of "casting them into the depths of the sea;" and of "not imputing iniquity," (Isa. xliii. 25; xliv. 22; Jer. xxxi. 34; Mic. vii. 19). The apostles assures us, that all who believe *are justified* from "all things;" that the blood of Christ cleanseth them "from all sin;" and that even little children in Christ have their sins forgiven them, for his name's sake, (Acts iii. 19; xiii. 38, 39; 2 Cor. v. 19; 1 John i. 7; ii. 12.) So that the forgiveness and justification of believers are stated to be already past; and their deliverance from condemnation is not represented as a future contingency, but as secured to them by an irrevocable grant: "being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But, though this be the privilege of all true believers without exception, yet the *actual assurance that the blessing belongs to them*, is possessed only by some, and only at times, even by many of these: for true faith may be very weak, and it may connect with a confused judgment, a considerable degree of ignorance, many prejudices or mistakes, and sometimes a prevalence of carnal affections. So that a man may believe with a trembling faith, and cry out with tears, "Lord help my unbelief:" or he may firmly credit the testimony, and rely on the promises of God, with a full persuasion of his power and willingness to perform them; and yet doubt whether he do not presume and deceive himself, in supposing his faith to be of a saving nature: in various ways a man may doubt whether he be a true believer, though he do not doubt but that Christ will certainly save all true believers. Nay, the frame even of a real Christian's mind, and the present tenor of his conduct, may render such doubts reasonable and the necessary consequence of faith: for if a man yield to those evils, which the Scripture enumerates as marks of un-

Digitized by Google

conversion, the more entirely he credits the Divine testimony, the greater reason will he have to call his own state in question: and I suppose that when St. Paul told the Galatians, that he stood in doubt of them, he meant to induce them to examine whether they were in the faith, or whether they had hitherto deceived themselves. We are therefore directed to give diligence both to obtain, and to preserve the full assurance of hope," (Heb. vi. 11; 2 Pet. i. 10): but this would not be proper advice to believers, if saving faith consisted in being sure of an interest in Christ; which doctrine, (though incautiously maintained by some very respectable persons), is evidently suited to discourage feeble believers, and to bolster up the false confidence of hypocrites. In proportion as it is manifest that we are regenerate, that our faith is living, that it works by love, and is accompanied by repentance, and that we partake of the "sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience;" we may be sure that our sins are pardoned, and that all the promises of God shall be accomplished to us. Yet misapprehension, and excessive fear of being deceived in a concern of infinite moment, exclude many, who have these evidences, from enjoying this assurance, except when immediately favoured with the consolations of the Spirit; whilst conformity to the world in this day of outward peace and prosperity, prevents many others from attaining to that decision of character which warrants it; and an abatement in diligence and fervency of affection causes others to lose the assurance which once they enjoyed, and to walk in doubt and darkness, because they have grieved their holy Comforter. Hence it appears, that the *assurance of salvation* is rather the gracious recompence of a fruitful and diligent profession of the gospel, than the privilege of all, who are in a state of acceptance: and though all doubting may originate directly or remotely from unbelief; yet frequently it is the evidence that a man credits the testimony of God, concerning the deceitfulness of the heart, the subtlety of Satan, and the characters of those who are in the broad, and those who are in the narrow way. These same observations are equally applicable to all the other privileges, which we are about to consider: for in every one of them, the distinction between a title to the blessing, in the sight of God, and the actual assurance and enjoyment of it in our own souls should be carefully noted: the former is not affected by the believer's varied success in his spiritual warfare; the latter must be continually influenced by the assaults and temptations of the enemy, and by his own conduct respecting them.

II. The true Christian, "being justified by faith," "is reconciled to God:" a perfect amity succeeds, and a covenant of peace and friendship is, as it were, signed and ratified; and therefore he is honoured by the appellation of the friend of God. When we contemplate the infinite majesty, authority, justice, and holiness of the Lord, and contrast with them the meanness, guilt, pollution, provocations, and ingratitude with which we are chargeable; when we consider, that he could easily, and might justly have destroyed us; that we cannot profit him, and that he could have created by his powerful word innumerable millions of nobler creatures to do him service; and when we further advert to the enmity of the carnal mind against his omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, righteousness, truth, sovereignty, service, cause, and people: we shall perceive, that we never can sufficiently admire his marvellous love, and our own unspeakable felicity, in being admitted to this blessed peace and friendship with the God of heaven; which is still more enhanced by the consideration, that "Christ is our peace, and that he made it for us by the blood of his cross," (Eph. ii. 14—19; Col. i. 14—22.) Nor can the advantages resulting from it be sufficiently valued: whilst believers, by the grace bestowed on them, are taught to love the character, servants, cause, truths precepts, and worship of God; to hate the things which he hates, to separate from his enemies, and to seek their liberty and felicity in his service; the Lord considers all kindnesses or injuries done to believers, as done to himself; and "will bless those that bless them, and curse those that curse them." All his perfections, which before seemed

Digitized by Google

with united force, to insure their destruction, now harmoniously engage to make them happy: his wisdom chooses their inheritance, his omniscience and omnipresence are their ever-watchful guard, his omnipotence their protector, his veracity and faithfulness their unfailing security; his satisfied justice, connected with mercy, vindicates their rights, and recompenses the fruits of his grace; and his bounty surely supplies all their wants. Nor does the Lord conceal from these his friends the reasons of his conduct in such matters as concern them, (Gen. xviii. 17—19; John xv. 15:) and he encourages them to open their inmost souls, and to pour out their sorrows and fears before him; so that they can rejoice that he is acquainted with those things, which they could not mention to the dearest and most intimate of their earthly friends. But indeed this privilege of reconciliation to, and friendship with God, comprises all our other blessings and expectations, here and hereafter: yet it may be more instructive to speak of them under different heads.

III. The believer is also adopted into the family of God, and admitted to all the honour and felicity of his beloved children. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God," (1 John iii. 1.) "Having chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; and predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will," &c. (Eph. i. 3—15;) he calls to us by his word "to come out and be separate—and he will receive us; and will be to us a Father, and we shall be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty," (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.) This call being accompanied by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, our minds are influenced to obey it; thus we are brought "to repentance and faith in Christ," our sins are pardoned, and we pass from the family and kingdom of the wicked one, into the household of God, by a gracious adoption. This term was borrowed from the custom of the ancients, who frequently took the children of others, and by a solemn legal process adopted them into their own family, gave them their name, educated them as their own, and left their estates to them. So that regeneration communicates to the soul a divine nature, and makes us the children of God; and adoption recognizes us as such, and admits us to the enjoyment of the privileges belonging to that relation. Thus pardoned rebels become the children and heirs of the almighty and everlasting God, by faith in Jesus Christ, (Gal. iii. 26.) But what words can express the value of this distinguished privilege! The adoption of the meanest beggar, or the vilest traitor, into the family of the greatest monarch, to be the heir of all his dignities, would produce but a trivial alteration in his circumstances: for vexation, sickness, and death would still await him; and the distance between the mightiest and the most abject of men or of creatures, is as nothing, compared with that which subsists between the great Creator, and all the works of his hands, (Isa. xl. 13—26.) But to be adopted as the children of God is not a mere name: it is a substantial good, an honour, a dignity, and an advantage which eclipses, and, as it were, swallows up all other benefits which can be obtained by any creature. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God," &c.; and we may be sure that every thing, which can prepare us for, and put us in possession of our incorruptible and eternal inheritance will be conferred by the love and bounty of our Almighty Friend and Father. But "we know not what we shall be:" "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." And lest we should imagine, that any possible honour, advantage, or felicity was excepted, when the inheritance of the children of God was mentioned; he hath been pleased to expand our views, and enlarge our expectations, by language taken from all the other most endeared relations of life. The obedient disciples of Christ are his brethren, his sisters, and his mothers; yea, their Maker is their Husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name, (Isa. liv. 5; Matt. xii. 46—50; Eph. v. 25—27.)

Digitized by Google

They who are thus adopted into the family of God, receive the spirit of adoption (instead of the spirit of bondage,) and are thus disposed and encouraged to say "Abba, Father;" or to address him as their Father, whatever language they speak, or to whatever country they belong. We ought not to understand this expression merely of a confidence that God is our Father: for believers are often actuated by the spirit of adoption when they are harassed with doubts whether they be the children of God or not; and many are very confident in this matter, while their actions demonstrate that they belong to another family, (John viii. 41—47.) This indeed more properly belongs to the believer's temper and character, than to his privileges: yet it is necessary here to observe in general, that the Holy Spirit producing in us that disposition towards God, which a dutiful son bears towards a wise and good father, manifests our regeneration and adoption, and bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children and heirs of God: and whilst we feel our minds habitually influenced to apply to him in all our difficulties, to revere him, rely on, love and obey him, to seek his glory, and rejoice in the success of the gospel and the prosperity of his people, &c.; we have "the witness in ourselves, that we are born of God," and adopted into his family, even though weakness of faith, misapprehension, or temptation should create an hesitation in our minds, whilst addressing him as our Father. This privilege, therefore, consists in the allowance and liberty of approaching the Lord at all times and for all things; of entrusting all our concerns in his hands, and of considering them all as managed by him in perfect wisdom, truth, and love, for our present and everlasting good. Indeed, the very disposition, produced by the Spirit of adoption is our privilege, and constitutes the seal, the first fruits, and the earnest of our felicity, (Rom. viii. 14—17; Gal. iv. 6, 7.)

IV. The believer has the firmest ground of confidence that all his temporal wants will be supplied, and that every thing which can possibly conduce to his advantage, will be conferred on him by his Almighty Friend and Father. We are not indeed authorized to expect or allowed to desire great things for ourselves in this world; and indeed it is evident to every reflecting person, that power, wealth, or constant prosperity, have so great a tendency to excite the envy or enmity of others, and to feed the distempers of mens' own minds, that they add nothing to the real enjoyment of life. But he who hath the security of the promise and providence of God, is more sure never to want any thing really good for him, than that man is who possesses the greatest wealth; for riches often strangely "make themselves wings and flee away:" but the unchangeable God, the possessor of heaven and earth, who has all hearts in his hand, can never be unable to provide for those who trust in him. "Bread shall be given them, their water shall be sure;" "verily they shall be fed;" "their Father knoweth what things they have need of," and "a little, which the righteous hath, is better than the riches of many wicked men," (Ps. xxiii. 1; xxxiv. 8—10; xxxvii; lxxxiv. 11; Matt. vi. 24—34; Phil. iv. 6, 7; 1 Pet. v. 7.) It is, threfore, the privilege and duty of every believer, to "cast all his cares and burthens upon the Lord," "to take no anxious care for the morrow;" to rest satisfied that "the Lord will provide," as "he hath promised that he will never leave him or forsake him." "Having food and raiment, we ought to be therewith content," and to go on with the duty of our station without any more solicitude, than the child feels, who, when learning his lesson, or obeying the command of his parents, cheerfully leaves them to provide him food and raiment, and does not encumber his mind with cares of this kind.

Indeed the believer is allowed and required to expect a peculiar providential interposition in all things: he is instructed that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the appointment of his Father, and that "the very hairs of his head are all numbered." He should consider the place of his abode as determined and guarded by the Lord; and that all the holy angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to his good: that he lies down and rises up, goes out and comes in, under this special protection; that no enemies

Digitized by Google

can assault, no calamity befal, no dangers so much as alarm him, except by the appointment or permission of his Almighty Father, who "makes a hedge about him, and all that he has," (Job i. 10; ii. 3—7.) So that no famines, earthquakes, pestilences, fires, wars, massacres, persecutions, or other dreaded catastrophe can hurt or should alarm him: for he is safe, and shall be guided, supported, and guarded in all places and circumstances till the appointed period of his pilgrimage arrive; and then he will be conveyed home to his Father's house, in the best way which infinite Wisdom and everlasting Love can devise. Thus "godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," (Job v. 19—27; Psalm xci; Rom. viii. 28; 1 Cor. iii. 21—23; 1 Tim. iv. 8.)

V. Communion with God is the believer's privilege. We "have boldness to enter into the holiest through the blood of Jesus," and to come to the throne of grace, that we "may obtain mercy, and find help in every time of need," (Heb. iv. 16; x. 19—22). We are directed to ask what we will, and assured that it shall be given us, "for the prayer of the upright is the Lord's delight," (Prov. xv. 8; Mark xi. 24; Luke xi. 5—13; John xiv. 13, 14: xv. 7—16; xvi. 23, 24; James i. 5; 1 John iii. 21, 22; v. 14, 15). So that we may come, with humble confidence, into the immediate presence of our reconciled Father, upon a mercy-seat, whenever we will; we may present whatever petitions our wants and circumstances suggest; we may multiply, repeat, and enforce them with all importunity and earnestness; we may urge every plea, and use all freedom; we may be assured of a cordial welcome in so doing; and we may confidently expect, that all our petitions will be answered and exceeded, in that sense and way which must conduce to our real good, (Eph. iii. 20). Thus we speak to our gracious God, in prayers, supplications, praises, and thanksgivings, notwithstanding that we are "but sinful dust and ashes," (Gen. xviii. 23—33): and our condescending Father speaks to us by his word, counselling, warning, instructing, encouraging, or reproving us; and thus showing us the way in which we should walk, and the thing that we should do; he evinces his regard to us by answering our prayers, and manifesting his care of us in numerous instances; he discovers his glorious perfections and gracious presence with us, and "causes his goodness to pass before us;" and he gives us, sometimes even in deep affliction, "a peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeping our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." For *truly* our fellowship "is with the Father and the Son," whatever men may think or say of such pretensions: and this happy experience essentially differs from the unscriptural presumption of enthusiasts and hypocrites; though strangers to such joy do and will confound them together, (1 John i. 3). Thus the believer, having returned to God, walks with him in his ordinances, commandments, and providential dispensations; tastes his love in every comfort, submits to his wise and fatherly correction in every cross, and deems it his privilege to refer every thing to his will and glory: and the Lord walks with him as his companion, guard, and guide through life; is with him in the valley of the shadow of death, and then takes him home to his more immediate presence, (Gen. v. 24).

VI. The believer experiences the consolations of the Holy Spirit in proportion to his faith, simplicity, diligence, and watchfulness. This holy Comforter (who dwells in every believer as in a temple that he hath consecrated to himself) irradiates the mind by his sacred influences, to see the things that belong to the person, love, and salvation of Christ, "and to know the blessings that are freely given him of God," (John xvi. 15, 16; 1 Cor. ii. 11, 12; Eph. i. 17, 18). He assists the memory in recollecting the words of the Saviour; and he invigorates faith, causes hope to abound, enlivens the mind with love and gratitude, and thus communicates a satisfying and sanctifying joy, the earnest and pledge of heavenly felicity. This counterbalances all outward trials, dissipates sorrow, fortifies the soul against temptation, reconciles it to suffering and self-denial, and animates it for every

Digitized by Google

service. It is the privilege of the believer *exclusively* to experience, relish, and value such joys; and to distinguish them from the joy of the hypocrite, which springs from ignorance, pride, and presumption: we are therefore exhorted "to rejoice in the Lord always;" and all our enfeebling dejection and sorrow result from our living below our privilege, and coming short of our duty in this as well as in other respects. Especially we forfeit and mar this joy, when we grieve the Spirit by our misconduct, or quench his holy influences by cleaving to the world, or by inexpedient self-indulgence; so that the apostle exhorts Christians, "not to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess," (from which others seek exhilaration), "but to be filled with the Spirit," (Eph. iv. 30; v. 18).

VII. It is the believer's privilege "to be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation," (1 Pet. i. 5). The actual comfort of this privilege must indeed depend on our Scriptural evidence, that we are true believers; as others can only persevere in ungodliness or hypocrisy: whilst one, therefore, doubts whether he be indeed regenerate, he cannot take the comfort of God's promises; for he cannot *know* that they belong to him: and whatever tends to bring his character into suspicion must proportionably interrupt his confidence, which is *only* intended to encourage the valiant soldier, when strenuously resisting his enemies, against the fear of being finally overcome by them. Christ, however, declares, that "his sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of his hand;" and that "the water he giveth shall be in them a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life;" "for it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom," (Luke xii. 32; John iv. 14; x. 27—30). The apostle assures us, that "nothing shall ever separate believers from the love of God in Christ," (Rom. viii. 35—39). The Lord hath made with them an everlasting covenant, and hath engaged, that "he will not turn away from them to do them good; and that he will put his fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from him," (1 Sam. xxiii. 5; Jer. xxxii. 38—40; Ps. ciii. 17; Isa. liv. 9, 10, 17): and this covenant he hath ratified with an oath, for the strong consolation of the heirs of promise; even the oath which he sware to Abraham, that in blessing he would bless him, notwithstanding all possible obstructions and objections, (Heb. vi. 15—18). Indeed, believers "being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and quickened by his grace when dead in sin;" it might reasonably be expected, that the same sovereign and everlasting mercy would influence him to keep them to complete salvation, by strength proportioned to their trials and temptations. We might mention as separate privileges the assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God, and combine to promote their everlasting advantage, however painful or humiliating for the present; so that they are more than conquerors over every enemy, being enriched by their assaults; that death is their friend, and his dreaded stroke proves their greatest gain, (Rom. viii. 28—31; 1 Cor. xv. 55—58); and that the everlasting God is their portion, and their all-sufficient and all-satisfying felicity.

But here silent contemplation best becomes us; and with this we will close these remarks, on a subject that is nearly inexhaustible. Enough has been said to show, that true wisdom consists in leaving, venturing, or suffering any thing to secure such advantages; and in giving diligence to possess the assurance that they belong to us: that, if we lived up to our privileges, the joy of the Lord would be our strength for every service; and our cheerfulness and conscientiousness would concur in adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour: and that our dejections arise not from our religion, but from our want of more faith, hope, love, and all those things in which true godliness consists.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVIII.

On the Dispositions and Character peculiar to the True Believer.

WHEN our Lord concluded his pathetic exhortations to his disconsolate disciples, just before his crucifixion, by a comprehensive prayer for them, he made this one of his petitions to the Father in their behalf, "Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth," (John xvii. 17); and the Scriptures always represent divine truth as *the seed* in the believer's heart of every holy disposition; *the graft*, which "makes the tree good, and its fruit good;" and *the mould*, into which the soul is cast, and from which it receives its form and exact impression, as the metal is fashioned by the artist's skill, (Rom. vi. 17, *original*). We are therefore sanctified by faith, (Acts xxvi. 18); and the doctrine of Christ dwells in the regenerate soul, as an operative transforming principle, producing a peculiar state of the judgment, dispositions, and affections, in proportion to the degree in which it is understood and believed. This may be called the Christian temper; it is the exact counterpart of the truths by which it is produced; it discriminates the real believer from all other men; and it constitutes the standard of our proficiency in vital godliness, of "our growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." For a great part of the acquaintance of most of us with the truths of revelation is merely *notional*: and if we do not perceive the genuine nature and tendency of the doctrines to which we assent, they must fail to exert their transforming efficacy upon our hearts; thus "knowledge puffeth up," even when the things known are evidently suited to produce the deepest humility; and though they never fail to have this effect, where they are received by a living faith as the nutriment and medicine of the soul. It may therefore be proper to consider more particularly those dispositions and affections of the mind, which constitute the appropriate temper and character of the true believer; adverting, as we proceed, to those truths by which they are produced and nourished; and endeavouring to distinguish between the lamented failures and imperfections of the upright, and the allowed and indulged evils of the mere hypocrite or self-deceiver.

I. Humility may be considered as most essential to the Christian temper, and as radical to every other part of it. The believer's principles continually present before his mind, the greatness and majesty of God, and the comparative meanness of all creatures: which cannot fail to abate his natural propensity to self-importance and self-exaltation, and to make him feel himself to be as nothing before the infinite Creator. Having received his being, and all he is and possesses, from the hand of the Lord, and holding every thing in the most absolute dependence on him, he cannot *consistently* glory, as though he had not received them. He knows that every benefit lays him under obligation; that every talent demands a proportionable improvement; and that he must shortly be turned out of his stewardship, and required to give an account of it; and he is conscious, that he has not made suitable returns to his Benefactor, or due improvement of his talents. This teaches him, that all those things of which he has been tempted to be proud, ought to cover him with shame and increase his humility; for they have all proved occasions of additional transgressions, and call upon him to repent and deprecate the wrath of his offended Benefactor. His principles also lead him to compare his conduct with the perfect law of God, and not with the examples and maxims of this sinful world; and to condemn every deviation from that strict and spiritual rule, even in thought or inclination, as sin, and as deserving the Lord's displeasure and abhorrence; so that every part of his past and present behaviour suggests to him reasons for self-abasement;

Digitized by Google

for sin mixes with and defiles even his best duties; and he feels his need of repentance, of mercy, and of the atoning blood in every action of his life. He is deeply convinced, that it "is of the Lord's mercies he is not consumed;" all his hopes of acceptance and happiness spring from faith in the Lamb of God, and his expiatory sacrifice; and he receives every comfort, not only as the gift of the Lord's bounty, but as purchased by his Redeemer for an hell-deserving sinner; how then can he, who lives under the influence of these principles, be proud of his possessions or attainments? He dare not venture even to the mercy-seat of his forgiving God, except in the name of his beloved Son; and he deems it a precious favour, that he may be allowed thus to pray for mercy and salvation. Moreover, when he cannot but perceive that he differs from ungodly men, and from himself in former years, he knows that this difference is the effect of a divine influence on his mind: so that he sees abundant reason for thankfulness on this account, but none for pride and self-complacency. Nay, he is sensible that he hath been kept from the gross immoralities, through which numbers are made equally mischievous and wretched, by a divine interposition, in various ways restraining him from listening to temptation, or following the devices of his own heart: so that his preservation from the most destructive enormities is rather an occasion for gratitude than for self-preference; whilst his misconduct in less scandalous instances seems to him to be baser, when compared with his advantages, than the crimes of the unhappy outcasts from human society.

As he also frequently and carefully views himself in the glass of the holy law, and compares his conduct with the perfect example of Christ; as he attentively considers his obligations and opportunities, and examines strictly his motives, affections, thoughts, words, and works: as he is more severe in judging himself, and candid in estimating the conduct of his brethren; so he is unavoidably led, in his best hours, to "esteem others more highly than himself, and in honour to prefer them;" thus he is disposed habitually to take the lowest place, instead of ambitiously aspiring to pre-eminence, which always results from the want of consistency with evangelical principles. He is also accustomed to entertain a deep sense of his own ignorance, and proneness to mistake; for his experience and observation confirm the declarations of Scripture in this respect: hence originates a teachable disposition, and a willingness to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child," and "to become a fool," in order to obtain true wisdom. The most eminent saints have therefore always most felt and owned their want of wisdom, and been most ready to ask it of God, (James i. 5); and to inquire his will at every step, with the greatest simplicity and fervency. And though the well-instructed believer will not call any man master upon earth, but will bring every opinion and counsel to the touch-stone of God's word; yet he will be always learning, even from his inferiors, his enemies, or false accusers: being glad of a little additional light on his path from any quarter. And whilst he considers the written word as the complete rule of truth and duty, and decidedly rejects both the traditions of men, and the effusions of enthusiasm; he will ever feel his need of divine teaching to prepare his mind for receiving and using the light of revelation, whatever means he employ in order to understand it; and he will continue a learner to the end of his days, which constitutes his security against the artifices of Satan, and the devices of false teachers.

In like manner, the consistent Christian is humbly sensible of his own weakness; and, when he is actually influenced by his principles, he will not dare to say, "though all men deny thee, yet will not I;" but rather, "hold thou me up and I shall be safe," "lead me not into temptation," "hold up my goings in thy ways, that my footsteps slip not." Experience hath convinced him, "that when he is weak, then is he strong," and that "when he thinks he stands, he has most cause to take heed lest he should fall:" so that he is conscious that he has no power in himself, either to resist temptations, endure tribulations, face dangers, or perform duties: and that he can onl

Digitized by Google

"be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," (2 Cor. xii. 9, 20; Eph. vi. 10; Phil. iv. 13). Thus simplicity of dependence on God for teaching, assistance, protection, forgiveness, acceptance, sanctification, &c., are produced and maintained: the believer becomes more and more poor in spirit, a beggar in every thing, and a constant pensioner on the Lord in all circumstances, and on all occasions. And though even this peculiarity of the true believer partakes of that imperfection which pervades his whole character; and he often betrays and is humbled for the pride of his heart, and continually laments his proneness to self-exaltation; yet in this manner, "boasting is" habitually "excluded," with self-preference, self-admiration, and contempt of others: and, in short, all the varied workings of ambition, arrogance, insolence, vain-glory, and envy, with the numerous evils of which pride is the prolific parent, are opposed, hated, mortified, and crucified; and a lowly, self-abased, contrite, and submissive spirit is gradually formed, both in respect of God, and his brethren and neighbours. Every part of the Christian temper and character depends on this, and springs from it, as from its proper root: and that person is not much conversant in the Scriptures, who has not observed, that more is there spoken in approbation of this disposition of mind, and that more encouraging promises are made to it, than to any other part of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" for "he resisteth the proud, and giveth his grace to the humble," (Isaiah lvii. 15; lxvi. 2; Luke xviii. 14; James iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 5.) So that all notions, gifts, and experiences, which consist with allowed prevailing and habitual pride, ambition, self-exaltation, boasting, and contempt of others, are radically defective; and give cause to suspect, that they are wholly detached from the power of godliness, and the special grace of the regenerating Spirit of Christ, however splendid they may be.

II. Another branch of the Christian temper may be comprised in the word *submission*. "Submit yourselves to God," says the apostle; and that view of the Divine perfections, law, government, and grace, which spring from evangelical principles, tends to counteract and crucify the self-will and desire of independence, which predominate in our fallen nature, and are the source of all our rebellion against our Maker. This submission is diametrically opposite to the dispositions of men in general; and in its full extent cannot be produced by any other principles, than those of the holy Scriptures. The efficacy of divine truth upon the believing mind tends to produce a willingness to *submit* the understanding to the teaching of God: and instead of hankering after the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, or counting it more pleasant to discover matters for ourselves by the sufficiency of our own powers; it leads us to submit as the scholar to his tutor, to believe what the Lord testifies, and to rest satisfied with it; leaving secret things which belong to him, and thankfully using revealed things as the light of our feet and the lantern of our paths. The same principles tend to produce *submission* to the will and authority of God, deeming his service perfect freedom, his commandments not grievous, his yoke easy, and his ways the paths of peace and pleasantness. *Submission* to his righteousness springs from the same source; and the man who truly believes the word of God, will gradually become more and more unreserved in allowing his justice in the sentence of condemnation which he hath passed upon sinners in general, and upon him in particular: in consequence of which he will also *submit* to his sovereign wisdom and righteousness in the appointed method of saving sinners, and in all things relating to it; whilst unbelief proportionably vents itself in objections which involve the most daring blasphemy. This will connect with *submission* to God in respect of his instituted ordinances, as means of grace appointed by him, to be made efficacious by his blessing; and as acts of worship by which we are required to render him, in a measure, the honour due to his name. And finally, these same principles tend to produce habitual *submission* to his providence in respect of our outward situation and provision; and of those appointments and regulations by which he hath been pleased to restrain vice,

Digitized by Google

and to promote peace and good order in human society; "giving honour to whom honour is due," "and submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." This submission is a duty of vast extent; and the disposition habitually to aim at it, and when we have failed to return to it, in every respect, is peculiar to those who are born of God; and all the opposition of our hearts to it, arises from the remaining pride and self-will of our nature, and is a proof that we have not hitherto been fully influenced by our principles.

But patience, resignation, contentment, and acquiescence in the will of God respecting us, constitute so important a part of the Christian temper, that they require a more particular consideration: and they are so essential a branch of submission to God, that wherever any appearances of them are found to be wholly separated from other parts of this general disposition, we may be sure that they are mere counterfeits, the result of natural insensibility, affected apathy, thoughtless indolence, or presumptuous obduracy. Evangelical principles so effectually inculcate the doctrine of our total unworthiness, and that we all enjoy more than we deserve, and suffer far less than what is due to our sins; that, as far as we are influenced by them, they must silence our rebellious murmurs and repinings against God; they lead us also so entirely to trace every event to his appointment as the first cause of all our trials, that they tend directly to counteract our propensity to despise his chastenings, or to vent our uneasiness under trouble in expressions of anger against instruments and second causes: they give us such a ground for confidence in the mercy, truth, power, and love of God, and for the animating hope of future happiness, as suffice to support the believer, and to preserve him from fainting or desponding under Divine rebukes; whilst the persuasion that infinite wisdom and everlasting love have chosen, and will over-rule every event for his more important good, is suited to produce a rational, reflecting and abiding acquiescence in the will of his heavenly Father. The Lord hath many wise and kind reasons for allotting his people those things which they would never have chosen for themselves; if they knew the whole intent of his most painful dispensations they would certainly approve of them: for every affliction is medicinal to the soul, and conducive to its sanctification. Thus the Christian's principles lead him to consider his station, abode, employment, provision, trials, losses, disappointments, and vexations as the will of God concerning him: and this induces him to acquiesce in them. He "learns" in the school of Christ, "in whatever state he is, therewith to be content;" and as far as he acts consistently with his judgment, he views every dispensation in a favourable light, and realizes the paradox, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." He seeks comfort from God, when other comforts are withdrawn; he is taught to wait the Lord's time for deliverance, "patiently continuing in well-doing;" without using any sinful expedients, or deserting his path or work, to escape the cross. He looks for trouble as long as he continues on earth; he esteems sin to be a greater evil than affliction; and in the character, sufferings, patience, and glory of his Divine Saviour, he finds every instruction explained, and every argument enforced, by which resignation, confidence in God, and joy in tribulations are inculcated. Indeed, in this, as in all other respects, the believer is conscious that he comes far short of his perfect rule and example; and this covers him with shame, and excites his earnest prayers for mercy and grace: but his views tend to render him cheerful at all times, and in all circumstances, as they give the fullest assurance, that every event will conduce to the final and eternal good of all who love God, (Rom. v. 3—5; James i. 2—4:) so that all the discouragement, despondency, and disquietude of religious people spring from other causes, and are directly contrary to their principles. A humble confidence in God, in respect of the future, is also of great importance: but this hath been considered as one of the believer's privileges, (Essay XVII;) and need not further be discussed in this place: for indeed our duties and our privileges are seldom more distinct than

Digitized by Google

the same object viewed in different lights, or the same idea expressed by different terms.

III. The fear of God is another part of the Christian temper, which evidently results from the principles of revelation. There is indeed a slavish fear, which hath torment, that love casts out as far as it prevails, (1 John iv. 18); but we speak of that reverential fear of the Divine majesty, authority, holiness, and glory, which produces solemn awe, humble adoration, serious recollection, and jealous circumspection; which induces a man to act habitually, as in the presence of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, and influences him to universal conscientiousness, even in his most secret actions, and in respect of his inmost thoughts; which teaches him to regard with profound veneration the name, word, works, counsels, decrees, and judgments of the Lord: which helps to constitute the upright, spiritual worshipper in all his ordinances; and which causes a man to fear the frown, and desire the favour of God above all things else. This "fear of God" is the effect of special grace, grows in harmony with holy love, and will be perfected with it when the Christian shall join the company and worship of seraphim before the throne, (Psalm lxxxix. 7; Isaiah vi. 1—8; Heb. xii. 28.) Every truth of revelation concurs in giving us those views of God, and of ourselves, that are suited to produce this reverential spirit: the total want of it, therefore, must evince that many high affections are false, and much overbearing confidence unwarranted: and that man must be very imperfectly acquainted with evangelical principles, or but partially influenced by them who is greatly deficient in it.

IV. The love of God is an essential part of the Christian temper; but it must be very briefly discussed in this place; as in many things it coincides with the first table of the law, which hath been already explained, (Essay IV.) The truths of the gospel, when received by living faith into the regenerate heart, are wonderfully suited to excite and increase admiring love of the Divine perfections, as displayed in all the works of God: but especially in that of redemption by Jesus Christ: hence arise fervent desires after that felicity, which is found in contemplating his glory and enjoying his love. The soul begins "to be athirst for God;" and in proportion to the prevalence of this holy affection for the Supreme Good, all inferior objects lose their attractions! so that when the believer fears lest he should not obtain the happiness of the beatific vision, but should at last be banished from the presence of God; he can take no pleasure in worldly prosperity: when his communion with the Lord is interrupted, all other joys seem insipid; but the light of his countenance gilds every object, alleviates every trouble, and enhances every comfort. Lively gratitude for mercies, inestimable, inexpressible, and unmerited, keeps pace with his hope of acceptance; and he cannot but most earnestly inquire, "what he shall render to the Lord for all his benefits?" The same views produce zeal for the glory of God and the honour of the gospel: and the believer is habitually disposed to consider what effect his conduct may have on the minds of men in this respect: whence humiliation, circumspection, and care to improve his talents must always arise. In all these affections and dispositions there will be a particular regard to the Person of Christ, as One with the Father and the Divine Spirit, and the equal object of all love, confidence, honour, gratitude, and adoration, (Essays VI, VII, XIII;) and an habitual disposition to meditate on his sufferings and love, to rejoice in his exaltation and the success of his gospel; and to desire that his name should everywhere be known, trusted in, and loved; and that his people should prosper and be happy. This love of Christ is the grand constraining principle of all evangelical obedience, and devoted subjection to him who bought us with his blood: and the several dispositions towards God, which have been enumerated, constitute the spirit of adoption; for when we have in this manner the temper of children towards God, the Holy Spirit bears witness, according to the Scripture, that he is our Father, and that we are his sons and daughters; the regenerate and adopted heirs of his heavenly inheritance.

Digitized by Google

V. The true believer is spiritually minded: that is, he is disposed to seek his happiness in spiritual things, because he is capable of relishing and delighting in them. Other men may have a task of religion; but the world is their element in which they live as much as their consciences will allow them: but the believer "has tasted that the Lord is gracious," "he remembers his love more than wine," "his soul has been satisfied, as with marrow and fatness, whilst he praised the Lord with joyful lips." In proportion, therefore, as he acts consistently with his principles; he either finds joy and pleasure in communion with God and doing his will, or he mourns after him. He feels that he must be miserable unless God, his exceeding joy, vouchsafe to make him happy: he separates from many companies and pursuits, to spend his time in the closet, in the house of God, or in the communion of the saints; not only from a sense of duty, but in order to enjoy his most valued pleasures, and to avoid whatever may interrupt them: and when he cannot find comfort in this way, and is tempted to seek it in the world, he is ready to say, "Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life." This is an essential part of the Christian temper; all attachment to worldly trifles arise from our not being duly influenced by our principles; and, as far as we act consistently, we shall attend to the lawful concerns, and use the allowed comforts of life in a sanctified and holy manner.

But a very copious subject yet remains: the temper of the believer towards his brethren and neighbours is equally worthy of our attention. Many things, indeed, which might be here adduced, will occur to us when relative duties come under consideration. It is, however, too copious and important a topic to be comprised in a very small compass; it will, therefore, be more expedient to annex a second part of this Essay, and to conclude at present with a few brief observations on what hath been said.

1. Every attentive and impartial reader must perceive, even from this imperfect sketch, that revelation is, *principally*, intended to lead men to proper thoughts of God, and suitable dispositions and affections towards him. They who suppose the moral precepts, which relate to the conduct of men towards one another, to be the most important and valuable part of Scripture, certainly mistake the leading intent of it: for godliness (or a disposition to behave towards God, according to the glory of his perfections, and our relations and obligations to him) is the first object, both in the commandments of the law, and in the doctrines and promises of the gospel: and the sins, against which the Lord always expresses the most vehement indignation (such as atheism, idolatry, apostacy, unbelief, enmity against him, contempt and forgetfulness of him, blasphemy, &c.,) may be habitually committed by men of good moral character, who are honest, sincere, benevolent, temperate, or peaceable, from selfish principles: but these things will not excuse hatred and neglect of their infinitely glorious Creator and Benefactor. Indeed, a man cannot be godly who is not moral: because we are required to express our regard to God by behaving well to our brethren and neighbours.

2. The principal value, even of divine truth, consists in its sanctifying efficacy on the minds of believers. Many "imprison the truth in unrighteousness;" and the doctrines of the gospel are often professed and contended for, with such arrogance, irreverence, and fierceness, that it is plain they are not *principles* in the heart, meliorating the disposition; but mere notions in the understanding, serving as an occasion of gratifying malignant passions, advancing worldly interests, or rendering a man conspicuous amongst his neighbours; and sensible men observing this, imbibe strong and fatal prejudices against the truth through the manifest misconduct of such advocates for it.

3. Even the smallest degree, in which the doctrines of the gospel operate as principles transforming the soul into their holy nature, suffices to prove them to be received with a measure of living faith: yet the Lord hath so arranged his plan, that various circumstances concur in preventing the believer from deriving a *strong Scriptural* assurance, from a *feeble* effect of truth

Digitized by Google

upon his mind. But in proportion as our principles induce us habitually to "exercise ourselves unto godliness," the certainty of the change becomes evident; our faith is proved to be living, and to work by love; and the Spirit of adoption witnesses with our spirits, that we are the children of God; yet this generally connects with deep humiliation, in respect of the small degree in which we are sanctified.

Finally, our rule is perfect, and grace teaches us to aim at perfection: but we are still in a state of warfare and imperfection, in which "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," will continue to be necessary. Blessed, then, are they, who *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness, for they, and they only, shall be eternally satisfied.

ESSAY XIX.

On the Dispositions and Character peculiar to the True Believer.

(In Continuation of the preceding Essay.)

In stating with brevity, yet with precision, the peculiarities of the Christian temper and character, as they are produced by the seed of Divine truth, and received into the heart by living faith, we shall sometimes be led to deduce coincident parts of them from different principles: and, therefore, some things which were touched upon in the former part of this Essay, may be here again resumed in another connection. This will especially be perceived in relation to that subject, with which I shall introduce what belongs to the temper of a Christian towards his brethren and neighbours, *viz.*

I. Indifference to the world, and the things of the world, (1 John ii. 15—17.) Patience, contentment, gratitude, and cheerfulness, have been shown to be the genuine effect of that confidence in God, and submission to his will, which arise from a real belief of the doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures; but they receive a collateral support also, from those views that the Christian has of the vanity of all earthly things, and the importance of eternity; whilst these, again, are essential to a proper frame of mind and tenor of conduct towards our neighbours. For what is most productive of immorality and mischief among mankind? Does not an inordinate eagerness in the pursuit of worldly objects occasion a vast proportion of the crimes and miseries that fill the earth? This has not only led men idolatrously to forsake, and wilfully to rebel against God, but it has also prompted them to become the oppressors and murderers of each other, in every age and nation, and thus to fill the earth with "lamentation, and mourning, and woe!" Nor can it reasonably be expected, that any effectual remedy can be applied to these evils, unless men can be generally convinced that the objects of their fierce contentions are mere vanity and vexation of spirit, and that nobler blessings are attainable. This has been so obvious to men of any reflection, that many sects of philosophers and the inventors of various superstitions, have manifestly proposed the same end in this respect as Christianity does; but their means have been so injudicious and inadequate, that they have only taught men to sacrifice one lust to another, and to deny sensuality or avarice, that they might more advantageously gratify the lust of dominion, or the thirst for the applause of men. But when the apostle "determined to glory in the cross of Christ alone," he found, "that the world was by it crucified to him," and that "he was crucified to the world," (Gal. vi. 14.) The world, and every thing in it, even "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and whatever was suited to gratify the appetites, the senses, the avarice, the ambition, or vain-glory of man, seemed to him no

Digitized by Google

more attractive than the distorted, defiled countenance of a crucified malefactor; and he was also entirely willing to be looked upon by all worldly men with that contempt, pity, or aversion, which such an object is suited to inspire. Indeed, the doctrines that relate to the incarnation of Christ; the birth of Emmanuel in a stable; his obscure education and life of labour till he entered on his public ministry; his subsequent poverty, hardship, reproach, and suffering, till he expired a sinless sacrifice on the cross; together with the circumstances of his followers, and the treatment they met with, are directly suited to mortify every corrupt affection of the human heart, and to create an indifference about all those objects which unbelievers idolize. The doctrine of the cross, when spiritually understood, gives us such a view of the deplorable condition into which sin hath plunged our species, and of the hopeless misery to which the most prosperous ungodly man is every moment exposed, as must tend to lower all earthly distinctions in the believer's estimation, and to break the fatal association in his mind between the idea of happiness and that of worldly prosperity; for he cannot but see, that a confluence of all earthly comforts avails not to preserve the possessor from death and hell, nor keep out the dread of them. That near view, also, which faith presents to the mind, of the reality and speedy approach of an eternal and unchangeable state, cannot but damp his ardour, and abate his assiduity in pursuing those things, which must so soon be left for ever; whilst the substantial possessions, the incorruptible honours, and the unalloyed pleasures which are proposed to his hope, tend to draw off his affections from the things "on the earth, and to fix them on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," (2 Cor. iv. 18; Col. iii. 1—4). For as the earth appears to us who live on its surface, to be made very unequal by the mountains that are upon it, yet could we rise above it, and view these at a distance, such inequalities would appear inconsiderable, compared with the magnitude of the globe; and, as we looked down upon it from a still greater distance, they would entirely vanish from our sight: so, to the carnal mind, the difference between rich and poor, prince and beggar, &c., seems immense; but, in proportion as our judgment and affections become spiritual, the disparity diminishes, till the distinction seems entirely to disappear. As all are sinners and mortals, all must stand before the impartial tribunal of God; all are under condemnation according to the law; all are invited to accept of the salvation of the gospel; and all must be eternally happy or miserable, as they are found in the company of believers or of unbelievers. So that indifference to the world and its honours, friendship, wealth, decorations, pomp, splendour, and indulgences, whether of the senses, the appetites, or the passions of the mind, is the genuine result of evangelical principles; and it is uniformly proportioned to the degree in which we are really influenced by them; so that every tendency to covetousness, ambition, vain-glory, dissatisfaction with mean or precarious provision, or the desire of things more ornamental, elegant, fashionable, or indulgent, than those which Providence hath allotted to us, is a proof that we are not fully cast into the mould of the truths which we profess. A Christian is a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; he wants accommodation during his abode in this foreign land, and his journey to his heavenly home; he cannot but prefer things pleasant to those that are painful; yet this is not his object, nor can he *consistently* loiter, turn aside, or disquiet himself about such matters; much less can he seek great things by disobeying his Lord, clouding his prospects, disgracing his character, or interrupting his comforts. His principles will indeed show him, that there is a place assigned to him, and that perhaps he cannot fill this place with propriety, without many externals which are of little value, and which many of his brethren have not; but he cannot *consistently* glory or rejoice in them, or prefer himself to others on that account; nay, he will rather deem them snares and incumbrances, which may retard his course, and induce him to conformity to the world. His duty may also call him to fill up a superior situation in society, and to possess authority or wealth, as the steward of God for the good

Digitized by Google

of others, or he may be engaged in any lawful business: but his principles will prevent him from loving the world, and teach him moderation, both in the pursuit of apparent advantages, and in the use of his possessions; they will dispose him to abstain from many things which others in similar situations seize upon, or indulge in; to shun what others deem desirable; and to consider the concessions which he makes to the customs of society, rather as a cross than as a satisfaction. The principles of revelation, indeed, are far from confounding the different ranks and orders in the community: nor do they countenance self-invented austerities, or a morose rejection of the rational comforts and satisfactions of life: for "the Lord hath given us all things richly to enjoy:" but they teach us to be satisfied with such things as we have, if we have merely "food and raiment," though the meanest and most scanty; to refrain from every thing inexpedient, as well as from whatever is unlawful; and not to put any interest or indulgence in competition, even with the peace and comfort of our weakest brother; they instruct us not to consider any earthly distinction as our riches, adorning, honour, or pleasure; to use all things as strangers that are about to leave them; to do all as the Lord's servants, and to improve all our advantages as his stewards: and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God." Whenever these ends require it, we are called upon to deny ourselves, to forsake all, to act as if we hated our dearest relatives, to part with every earthly possession, to take up our cross, and even lay down our lives for the sake of him who died for us and rose again; who hath expressly declared, that without this disposition, purpose, and conduct, we cannot be his disciples; and hath given motives and assurances sufficient to encourage us to make all these sacrifices with cheerfulness, (Matt. xvi. 24—26; xix. 29; Luke xiv. 25—33; 1 Cor. viii. 12, 13; x. 31; Heb. xiii. 5, 6). He hath moreover taught us "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" hath assured us, "that all things needful shall be added to us;" and hath given us a warrant to trust him in the path of duty, both in respect of ourselves, and of all that belong to us.

Moreover, our principles teach us to consider this world as a barren land and a scene of trouble, and to expect no rest in it; to take matters as we find them (except as the duty of our station may be concerned); and not to be anxious about our condition, though we be poor, or even slaves, because "the fashion of this world passeth away," (1 Cor. vii. 21—23; 29—31). All discontent, therefore, in obscure and indigent circumstances, as well as insolence in prosperity; all envy of the rich or renowned; all coveting or hankering after somewhat greater, easier, or more abundant; all eagerness in pursuing and seeking after worldly advantages; all sanguine expectation of those changes by which carnal men fancy, that the blanks of this world's lottery may become prizes; all inclination to spend more than we can afford in things not absolutely necessary, or to appear above our rank in our raiment, habitations, furniture or tables, and to incur debts by thus emulating our superiors; all that shame which we are apt to feel at the discovery even of honest, frugal poverty; all our reluctance to leave our children to earn their bread by menial labour, if the Lord be pleased so to appoint it; and a great many other things which we witness around us, and may be conscious of in ourselves, are manifest deviations from the spirit of Christianity, inconsistent with the principles of the gospel, and productive of many evil consequences. It does not indeed follow, that such persons as manifest a degree of these carnal propensities are insincere in their profession, but it proves, that they have but partially understood the tendency, and experienced the efficacy of the truth. And if any who contend for evangelical doctrines, are wholly strangers to this "crucifixion to the world," and treat such subjects as low and legal, without doubt their faith is dead, and their hope presumptuous: for all true Christians lament and mourn, that they are no more mortified to the world, and indifferent about its perishing trifles.

II. Benevolence, or philanthropy, is an eminent branch of the Christian

Digitized by Google

temper. The law of "loving our neighbour as ourselves," is written in the heart of every regenerate person, and it is constantly referred to in the New Testament, as the believer's rule of conduct towards all men; our Lord has beautifully illustrated its extensive meaning in the parable, or narrative, of the Good Samaritan; and he exemplified it in his beneficent life, and by dying for us when we were strangers and enemies. Every man, of whatever nation, complexion, or religion he may be, is our neighbour, whom we are to love as ourselves, and to whom we are to act as we would he should act towards us; and this is the substance of the second table of the law, (Essay IV.) The principles of the gospel also, respecting the worth of immortal souls; the ruined state of the whole human species; the sovereignty and freeness of Divine grace; the infinite sufficiency of the redemption of Christ: the love of the Father in sending his Son to be the Saviour of the world; the love of the Son in dying for us; the love of the Spirit in quickening us when dead in sin; the possibility of the greatest persecutor being made partaker of the same grace; as well as the precepts of our Lord (who enforced the spiritual duties of the law on his disciples by evangelical motives), must influence every one who experiences their transforming energy, to love his neighbour unfeignedly, and to aspire after a more perfect conformity to the holy commandment, and the attractive example of his gracious Saviour. These principles tend to enlarge the heart in good-will to men; to soften it into compassion; to subdue envy, enmity, and resentment; and to kindle an ardent desire after the present and future happiness of the human species, however distinguished and separated, or whatever their character and conduct towards us may be. This general disposition to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to regulate that love according to the rules of God's word, comprehends all the various affections which belong to the several relations of life; for these, when rational and legitimate, are only modifications of benevolence, or emanations from it, in conformity to the providential will of God, and in obedience to his commandments. In like manner, the special love to our brethren or fellow-Christians, results from the same general principle; for believers are related to each other more nearly than to any other persons; they are children of the same Father, heirs of the same inheritance, yea, members of the same body, partakers of the same divine life, and temples of the same Spirit; they are fellow-soldiers in the same army, fellow-travellers in the same journey, and denizens of the same heavenly city. They possess, also, an excellency peculiar to themselves, even the image of God, and the beauty of holiness; they are the brethren and representatives of Christ, to whom we are required to show all kindness for his sake, and as if he were personally present with us; and on all accounts they are entitled, not only to our good-will and compassion, but to our cordial approbation, esteem, and most endeared affection, (Gal. vi. 10). Evangelical principles must influence those who experience their energy, to delight in them, and to choose them as companions, (Psal. xvi. 3; cxix. 63); and this is the sure evidence that we "are passed from death unto life," (1 John iii. 14). For when we value and take pleasure in the society of those who bear the image of Christ, profess his gospel, and walk in his ways; when we find our hearts united to them in love, and enlarged in desires of promoting their welfare, not because they belong to our party, but because they belong to Christ; when our cordial affection is increased in proportion as they appear to us to bear his holy image, (even though they differ from us in some sentiments or forms), it then appears, that the truth dwells in us with transforming power, and that we really love the Lord himself. By nature we were disposed to dislike, shun, or neglect such persons, and even to despise and hate them: or if on other accounts we loved any of them, this affection might indeed make us tolerate their religious peculiarities, but it could not induce us to take pleasure in their spiritual conversation and behaviour. This love of the brethren may easily be distinguished from an attachment to those of our own party, who please us by coincidence of judgment, and by flattering our good opinion of

Digitized by Google

ourselves, (which is only a specious modification of self-love): for when this is all, a man will prefer the least spiritual, even of his own sect, *to those that are more so;* and will choose to associate with mere carnal men, who agree with him in sentiment on disputed points, rather than with the most eminent believers, who are of another opinion; and he will likewise always be more ready to engage in controversy, than to hold the truth in peace and love. From these two branches of the Christian temper, many others will result; and indeed they cannot be proved genuine, except by their connection with the rest.

III. A disposition to be "harmless and blameless" is the genuine effect of evangelical principles well understood and truly believed. The real Christian will perceive that the world is full of misery; and that this misery in a great measure, springs from the crimes of men, not only as a punishment inflicted by Divine justice, but also as a necessary effect of them. For men following the impulse of their appetites and passions, render themselves and others wretched, and seduce one another into such courses, as must end in future misery, except they be forsaken. His regard therefore to the happiness of others, and of himself, as well as his zeal for the glory of God, will influence him carefully to guard against every thing which tends to increase the sum total of human misery or vice; and his moderation respecting worldly things will place him out of the reach of many temptations to which others are exposed, or enable him to resist them. The true believer, therefore, will habitually aim to be just and honest in all his dealings; not grasping at gains which custom may have sanctioned, but which accord not with strict probity; not taking advantage of any man's ignorance or necessity, to circumvent or exact from him; not evading taxes, and leaving his neighbour to bear a disproportionate part of them; not insisting on his utmost due, when it would distress those that owe it; not keeping, by a continued fraud, that property which hath been unjustly obtained, when he hath it in his power to make restitution; not living extravagantly, or, engaging in perilous schemes, and thus contracting needless debts, to the injury of his creditors and family; not taking his neighbour's work without wages, or oppressing the poor to increase his wealth or support his luxury; not concurring in any plan for getting money, by methods which enslave the persons, expose the lives, or endanger the souls of men; not using the too customary impositions of trade, which are everywhere condemned in Scripture, however pleaded for by men professing to believe it; and which substitute the rule of *doing as others do to us*, instead *of doing as we would they should do to us.* In short, the consistent believer will conscientiously render to God, to Cæsar, and to all the different members of the community, their dues; rather choosing to give up his own right, than to infringe on that of another: and though he will not in every instance come up to that exactness that he proposes; yet his attainments will habitually accord with his knowledge of the Divine word, and his experience of its transforming efficacy on his heart. The same principles will influence him to "put away lying, and to speak truth with his neighbour;" paying the strictest regard to veracity, sincerity, and fidelity in all his professions, conversation, narration of facts, and engagements. The Christian cannot consistently trifle with so sacred a matter as truth, for the sake of a jest, an humorous tale, or a compliment; much less to gratify anger, malice, or avarice, or in flattery, slander, or religious controversy. He will aim to avoid all prevarication and equivocal expressions, and whatever has a tendency to deceive; his "yea will be yea, and his nay, nay:" he will study undisguised sincerity, and not, under professions of friendship, raise expectations which he hath no intention or prospect of answering: he will deem himself bound to punctuality and fidelity to all his engagements, even when they prove injurious to him; and he will certainly fulfil them, if it be required and practicable, provided he was not deceived in the grounds on which he made them, and no command of God be violated by it, (Ps. xv. 4.) The same disposition of leading a blameless and harmless life, will influence

Digitized by Google

him to those kinds and that degree of self-denial, which are requisite in order to avoid gratifying any inclination by disturbing the peace, corrupting the morals, or injuring the person of another; or which may in any way tempt, weaken, or stumble those around him. It will equally caution him to bridle his tongue, and to abstain from all bitter, provoking, backbiting, or corrupting discourse; and from all words, however witty and ingenious, which tend to pollute the imaginations, to inflame the passions, to asperse the reputations, or disturb the domestic harmony of any one. Nay, consistency requires the believer to avoid every expression that may give needless uneasiness to another; and to refrain from repeating disadvantageous reports, though known to be true, except when it is necessary to prevent others from being deceived or injured. In these, and many other particulars, the believer's principles will influence him to "avoid all appearance of evil," when it can be done with a clear conscience; to take care "not to have his good evil spoken of;" to "provide things honest in the sight of all;" and to give no needless offence to any man. Thus he will endeavour by well-doing to put to silence false accusers, and to compel even those that hate his religion to allow him to be a quiet good kind of a person. Alas! "in many things we offend all;" but the consistent Christian will excuse none of his failures; on the contrary, he will condemn himself more severely than others do, when he is conscious of having acted wrong. Let it be here also noted, that diligence in the proper business of a man's station, without meddling with such things as do not belong to it, is an essential part of a harmless conduct; and the consistent Christian will be very frugal and provident, and submit to many hardships, rather than burden others, or *needlessly* leave his family to be maintained by them: the example of Christ and his apostles, as well as the precepts of the New Testament, show, that every degree of sloth and bad management, by which men are reduced to a disgraceful poverty, and led to intercept what others have a prior claim to, is inconsistent with Christian principles, however zealous such men may be for the doctrines and ordinances of religion: and surely evangelical motives should induce us to fill up our proper stations as diligently, as worldly motives do the most respectable part of ungodly men.

IV. A disposition "to love mercy," and to be kind and liberal in doing good, is peculiarly the effect of Christian principles. The wealthy, remembering "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. (2 Cor. viii. 9), are charged "to abound in this grace also," (1 Tim. vi. 17—19): (but many things on this topic will be discussed in an Essay on the improvement of our talents) yet even they "who labour, working with their hands, should give to them that need;" and the cup of cold water, or the widow's two mites, may express a willing mind as decidedly as the large beneficence of the wealthy. But active kindness does not consist merely in giving: a man may express much love by thwarting his own inclination or foregoing his ease, that he may serve others: that charity of which the apostle speaks so highly, (1 Cor. xiii), is especially distinguished by its unfeigned desire and aim to promote both the temporal and eternal good of others; and may be shown in a vast variety of unexpensive services, and in minute self-denials, accompanied with alacrity and kindness. The consistent Christian, in the lowest condition, will never want occasion of convincing his little circle, that he wishes to do them good, and is habitually ready to put himself to trouble and inconvenience for that purpose; while he will always be able to pray for numbers to whom he can render no other service. And though the household of faith be entitled to the preference in such works and labours of love; yet none, (not even our bitterest enemies, persecutors) are to be excluded from them.

V. Christian principles will induce a man (whilst thus endeavouring to do good to all, and harm to none) to suffer long, to forbear, forgive, and pursue peace with all men. The patience and long-suffering of God, though provoked continually; his exuberant kindness, in plentifully supplying the wants, and protecting the persons of the wicked, (Matt. v. 43—48); and es-

Digitized by Google

pecially his forbearance towards us when we were enemies to him, and the inexpressible grace by which we were made his friends; his mercy in beseeching sinners to be reconciled to him; his readiness to forgive the most numerous and aggravated rebellions, and to confer all blessings on every one who applies for them; his persevering love to believers, notwithstanding their subsequent ingratitude and misconduct; the example of Christ, "who when he was reviled, reviled not again," but prayed for his murderers with his dying breath, (Luke xxiii. 34; 1 Pet. ii. 20—24), the constant tenor of the New Testament precepts; and the rebukes given to the disciples when they were actuated by a different spirit, combine to show of what importance this disposition is, and undeniably prove that it is the certain effect of evangelical principles, well understood, and truly believed, (Luke vi. 27—36; ix. 51—56; Rom. xii. 14, 19—21; 1 Pet. iii. 9). If the professed Christian only loves those who are of his own sect or religion, what does he more than others? Or in what does the peculiar effect of his principles, and the grace given unto him, appear? Indeed, this disposition is essential to the very exercise of living faith; and our Lord has expressly declared, that except we forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father will not forgive us, (Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15); he hath taught us to ask forgiveness of God, "as we forgive them that trespass against us;" so that the prayer of a revengeful man for pardon is in fact an imprecation of Divine vengeance on himself: he hath illustrated the subject by a most affecting parable, (Matt. xviii. 21—35:) and he requires us to forgive our brethren, not only till seven times, but till seventy times seven; yea, seven times a-day, if the offender need it, and ask for it, (Luke xvii. 3, 4). We are exhorted "to put on, as the elect of God, (holy and beloved), bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us," (Eph. iv. 1, 2, 31, 32; v. 1, 2; Col. iii. 12, 13). Nor is this to be confined to our brethren, but to be extended even to our most furious persecutors, notwithstanding all their curses and cruelties; for "even hereunto were we called." We are not indeed required to place any confidence in such men, or to confer special favours upon them, (for the Lord restricts his special favours to his chosen people): much less ought we to love the crimes and society, or to countenance the heresy, infidelity, idolatry, or superstition of those who hate the Lord: but we may express our decided abhorrence of their vices and errors, and oppose them with the utmost firmness, and yet relieve their urgent wants, assist them in perils and distresses, seek their best welfare, forgive their injuries, pour out our prayers for their conversion, answer their revilings and imprecations with mild language and good wishes, and persevere in endeavouring to "overcome evil with good." We may lose the thoughts of a man's ill usage of us, in considering the misery he is bringing on himself; and we may take a decided part against him from a sense of duty, whilst resentment has yielded to compassion in our hearts, and our secret prayers form an authentic evidence of our love to his soul. Thus the judge or prosecutor may pity, and express good-will to the criminal, whose condemnation is a debt owing to the public: thus a man may forgive, and show all proper lenity to the fraudulent debtor or assailant; whilst his duty to his own creditors and family compel him to seek legal redress for important injuries, or to ward off such as are threatened: and the zealous servant of Christ may write or preach against antichristian or infidel principles, in the most energetic manner (provided he do not violate the rules of truth and meekness); and yet may be ready to relieve the urgent wants and to pity the miseries of those who hold them: so that they who object to such conduct, certainly "know not what spirit they are of;" but suppose those censures to spring from warmer zeal, which are the effect of an haughty, bitter, violent, and vindictive disposition. Thus the apostle exhorted "the man who was endued with knowledge, to show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom;" and he added, "that if any had bit-

Digitized by Google

ter envying and strife in their hearts, they ought not to glory, or to lie against the truth" (as if the doctrine of Christ were to be blamed for their misconduct): "this wisdom," says he, "descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual," (or *natural*,) and "devilish: for where envy and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above," (the gift of God in answer to the prayer of faith, and the genuine effect of Christian principles) "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them that make peace;" for "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," (James i. 5, 19, 20; iii. 5—18). In all cases where boasting, reviling, slander, contest for victory, rash judging, misrepresentation, and a disposition to expose an opponent to ridicule, contempt, or enmity, are admitted; where anathemas, or personal reflections foreign to the subject in hand are vented; or a desire of punishing men for their religious opinions, or of withholding from them the common offices of humanity, is intimated; there the spirit of Christianity ceases, and the same principles operate, which kindled all the fires of pagan or papal persecution: and whatever be the tenets or pretexts of persons who indulge such tempers towards their own enemies or those of their religion; they are (perhaps unawares) imitating and sanctioning the very evils which excite their vehement indignation. It is in vain for men to say that they forgive and do good to their own enemies, and only object to kindness shown to the enemies of Christ; for how can the bitter persecutors of Christians be any other than the enemies of Christ? And did not all those professed Christians, who anathematized, imprisoned, enslaved, starved, burned, or massacred *heretics* as they called them, by millions, pretend that they were actuated by zeal *for* the honour of Christ, and against his enemies? In vain do men adduce a few passages from Scripture to sanction such a spirit and conduct: an inspired writer might properly denounce vengeance on the inveterate enemies of God, and utter prophecies respecting them: but such exempt cases do not constitute our rule of conduct, for that must be regulated by the express precepts of Scripture and the example of Christ, *as he was obedient to the law for us*; nor may we follow even a prophet or apostle further than they followed the Lord.

Christian principles therefore will teach a man, as far as he is influenced by them, to recede from his right for the sake of peace and love, in all things that consist with other duties: and to "follow peace with all men," and "to pursue after it," even when it flies from him. He will especially endeavour to promote the peace of the church, and avoid whatever may disturb it; he would, "if possible, live peaceably with all men," and will only deviate from this rule when compelled to it by his duty. He is also a peacemaker as far as he has any influence, both among his brethren and neighbours; he desires to be of one mind and judgment with all who appear to love the Lord: and if he must differ from them in sentiment, he would differ amicably and reluctantly; for he endeavours to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" he aims to do "all things without murmurings and disputings," and nothing "through strife and vain-glory:" "knowing that the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." He is aware, that God alone can "give men repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;" and that revilings and bitter sarcasms are none of the means which he hath instituted, and on which a blessing may be expected. His self-knowledge and experience forbid him to disdain or despair of others; and so long as he deems it right to address himself to them at all, he will do it with a hope and a prayer, that they may yet be saved by sovereign grace. The same principles influence the believer to cultivate an habitual forbearance, and a readiness to pass over and forgive the manifold little faults, mistakes, and petulances, which we must expect to meet with even in the best of men, whilst they continue in this imperfect state; for he knows that he needs such re-

Digitized by Google

ciprocal forbearance from them: and without this mantle of love covering the multitude of faults, no peace can be expected in human society. He will be taught to bear without much concern those affronts which proud men deem it a point of honour to resent, whatever consequences ensue: and if he be ridiculed or reviled for his tameness, he remembers the meekness of Christ amidst the scorn and cruelty of his enemies. His point of honour consists in not suffering himself to be overcome by any kind or degree of evil; in overcoming evil with good: and in subduing his own spirit: and his fortitude is shown, by facing dangers, and enduring hardships in the cause, and after the example of Christ. But when he is conscious of having injured or affronted others, he will readily submit to the most humiliating concessions, or reparation, for the sake of peace. His principles also teach him to avoid every irritating expression, and to stifle the rising of resentment for injuries received; to fear harbouring a prejudice or grudge against any man, (for "anger resteth" only "in the bosom of a fool"); to watch his opportunity of convincing an obstinate enemy, that he bears him no ill-will, but would gladly live amicably with him; and to forget, as far as he can, the hard treatment he hath met with, not loving to mention it, or hear others expatiate on it, and only recollecting it in order to pray for the injurious party. On the other hand, the same views will lead him to remember, and to mention when proper, the kindness shown him; for they lead to gratitude, not only to the Giver, but to the instruments of all our comforts. We might further enlarge on the candour in judging of men's motives, and of those actions that may admit of a more or less favourable construction; the courteousness, affability, affectionate behaviour, &c., which Christian principles proportionably effect; but we must not at present proceed any further. The apostle's description of that charity, or love, which is even greater than faith and hope, includes all that hath been advanced, and much more. As a natural philosopher would define gold by its peculiar properties, which exist as really in a grain as in a talent; so he shows the nature of love itself, whether a man hath more or less of it. "Charity suffers long, and is kind; doth not envy or vaunt herself, is not puffed up, doth not behave herself unseemingly, seeketh not her own" interest, credit, ease, or indulgence; "is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth," (1 Cor. xiii). As far then as Christian principles prevail, peace, harmony, and comfort abound; and were they universally influential, they would rectify the whole moral state of the world. What then shall we think of those who spend their lives in running them down, or representing them as of licentious tendency? What shall we say concerning those who take occasion from the gospel to indulge their selfish, sensual, or malignant passions? or to what shall we ascribe the improper conduct even of true Christians, but to their want of a fuller acquaintance with the tendency of their principles, and a more complete experience of their efficacy?

ESSAY XX.

On the Believer's Attention to Relative Duties.

THOSE dispositions of mind, which a real belief of evangelical truth never fails to produce, will be especially manifested by a conscientious attention to the duties of the several relations which constitute human society, according to the precepts and exhortations of the holy Scriptures: by this the excellency of our principles is peculiarly displayed, and true holiness is distinguished from all counterfeits. Our *natural* propensities are so diversified by

Digitized by Google

constitution, education, habits, connections, and pursuits; that they sometimes assume the appearance of certain gracious dispositions: a courageous temper may be mistaken for Christian firmness and fortitude; an indolent or yielding turn of mind may pass for Christian meekness, pliancy, and compassion, &c. Yet the counterfeit is perfectly distinct from that holy temper to which it is assimilated; and has very little effect on a man's *general* conduct, though it may be very conspicuous in a few detached instances: at the same time it unfits men for several parts of their duty, renders them peculiarly prone to sins which coincide with their natural propensity, and leaves them regardless of the will and glory of God, and of the true happiness of mankind, in their best actions. Even when the mind is in a measure influenced by divine grace, natural propensities may often deceive us as to the degree of it; a harsh, rough, violent, or obstinate temper, will induce an appearance of zeal and boldness in religion far beyond what is genuine; and, on the other hand, will prevent superficial observers from perceiving how much right principles have humbled, softened, and meliorated the mind; and this will also create the believer himself a great deal of trouble and uneasiness, perhaps to the end of his days. In like manner, a timid, placid, indolent temper, will give a man an appearance of great meekness and gentleness, even when he is but little influenced by principles: whilst the greatest prevalence of grace in his heart, will leave him too much disposed to make improper compliances, and to decline hardships, dangers, difficulties, and contests.

But when the Christian is followed into the retired scenes of life, the habitual effect of his principles may be more precisely ascertained; and his attention to the welfare, comfort, and peace of all around him, even at the expense of many personal inconveniences and much self-denial, will prove his piety to be genuine and of the most salutary tendency. This will therefore constitute the subject of the present Essay; and the strictest regard to brevity will not prevent the necessity of dividing it into two parts.

It may be useful to premise a few observations.

1. When we state the believer's relative duties, we do not mean that other men are exempted from the same obligations: but merely that Christian principles, and the grace given with them, incline and enable believers habitually to attend to their duties, in the whole tenour of their conduct, though they do not perform them in that extent and perfection in which they own them to be obligatory: whereas other men either live without rule, or lay down rules for themselves, that differ widely from the precepts of Scripture; or they *allow themselves habitually to neglect their known duty*, in this as well as in other particulars.

2. The attention to relative duties, produced by evangelical principles, differs widely even from that which results from regard to the authority of God as a lawgiver. In this case, the fear of punishment or the hope of reward, are the only influential motives of a religious nature; and these indeed, aided by self-love in its manifold operations, and by natural affection, may in particular circumstances produce a very decent outward conduct: but believers, besides all these motives, are influenced by the constraining love of Christ, a sense of immense obligations received, a desire of adorning and recommending the gospel, and an unfeigned love to all around them, producing a permanent attention to every thing connected with their present and eternal welfare. We therefore find that the apostles always inculcate relative duties from these and similar considerations; and thus affixed an evangelical stamp to their practical instructions, as well as a practical stamp to their doctrinal discussions.

3. We may observe, that the believer indeed endeavours "to show his faith by his works," but he also judges his works by the strict rule of the spiritual commands: so that whilst he hopes for a *gracious* reward from his reconciled God, according to the new covenant in the blood of Christ; he is conscious that his best performance, even of relative duties, is so defective

Digitized by Google

as to deserve punishment, if the Lord should be extreme to mark what is done amiss. He will therefore habitually connect the exercise of repentance and faith with all his obedience, even when nothing occurs to bring the reality of his grace into suspicion.

4. We may observe, that the sacred writers generally begin with the duties of the inferior relations; whether it be that these are commonly the most difficult to our self-willed ungovernable nature; or that a greater number of believers occupy these stations; or that the advantageous performance of the duties belonging to the superior relations depends much on the conduct of inferiors. But however they may be, we must carefully observe, that in most instances the failure of one party in the reciprocal relations does not excuse the other in neglecting their duties, though it commonly increases the difficulty, and renders it a more severe trial of any person's faith and obedience. In this the excellency of Scripture principles especially appears; if we only behave well in relative life to them who behave well to us, what do we more than others? This is merely *doing as we are done by*, not *as we would be done by*. This being premised, we proceed to consider—

I. The reciprocal duties of husbands and wives; as from this relation most others are regularly derived. The Creator himself instituted this union before the entrance of sin, for the most wise, kind, and important purposes, with which his whole plan respecting the human race was inseparably connected. He saw, that "it was not good for Adam," even in Paradise, "to be alone;" and that "there was no help meet for him," to be found among all the other creatures; no one suited to engage his affections, participate his enjoyments, constitute his companion, or unite with him in the worship of God. He was therefore pleased to form the woman from his side, as "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," to lay the foundation of a moderate subordination and most rational affection; and thus he gave her to Adam, to be his associate and counterpart, and to unite with him in training up their common offspring; that she might yield him the willing obedience of cordial esteem and affection, and receive from him the attention, protection, and counsel of wisdom, love, and mild authority. The Lord made no more than one woman for Adam, (Mal. ii. 15): for the most remote desire of polygamy could never have entered man's heart, had he not become a sinner: he joined Adam and Eve together, blessed them, and pronounced the union indissoluble by the authority of any creature; for no cause of divorce could have subsisted in holy creatures: and he added, "for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." To this original institution our Lord repeatedly referred in his decisions on this subject; constantly inserting the word *twain* along with the words used by the sacred historian, lest any corrupt interpretation should be super-induced. Had not sin entered, this union would doubtless have subsisted during the whole term of probation allotted to Adam and Eve, or to the rest of their posterity, till they were admitted to that more exalted state, which was proposed as the reward of entire obedience: and that unalterable fidelity, attachment, and affection, which, with their inseparable effects, must have resulted from the perfection of human nature, are still required by the spiritual law of God, as far as circumstances continue to be the same. But many and great changes have taken place in consequence of the fall. "Sin hath entered into the world, and death by sin:" the Lord himself often dissolves the marriage union soon after it hath been formed; and at what time soever this separation takes place, his word leaves the surviving party entirely at liberty to form another union, if that be deemed expedient. Unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant in either party makes way for the dissolution of the union, as by a moral death; and where it is clearly proved, without any suspicion of collusion, a divorce should be easily and certainly attainable. Various circumstances in the present degraded state of human nature, by weakening the authority of reason, and giving force to the passions, add to the original ends for which marriage was instituted. The

Digitized by Google

manifold mistakes, imperfections, and faults, to which all are liable, render mutual forbearance, forgiveness, and self-denying concessions essential to connubial harmony and comfort: whilst the malignity, sensuality, and obduracy of which fallen man is capable, induced the Lord himself to *permit* divorces and polygamy among the Jews, to prevent more dreadful consequences; but as the Christian dispensation contains no municipal law, so it makes no such allowances. Moreover, the manifold sorrows, pains, trials, and temptations, to which our race is now exposed, and the peculiar sufferings incident to the female sex, have given rise to a variety of duties, which would not otherwise have been incumbent: so that the relative obligations of this union vary exceedingly from what they would have been had not sin entered, and become more difficult to be performed.

Several questions relative to the subject, do not immediately belong to the design of these Essays: but we observe in general, that some legal and authenticated recognition is absolutely necessary to distinguish this honourable union from all temporary and disgraceful connections; for the opinion that the consent of the parties *alone* is essential to marriage, to which the outward ceremony can give no additional validity, is suited to answer the purpose of libertines; and tends to multiply seductions, to introduce confusion, and to disseminate licentiousness. Should it be granted, that this or the other form of solemnizing matrimony is not in itself of divine authority, it must also be maintained, that some warranted form is indispensably necessary: and it will follow, that the form appointed by the laws of our country is sanctioned by the Lord also: unless it can be proved, that he hath excluded legislators from making such appointments, by prescribing the requisite form in his holy word; or that the form fixed upon by them is in itself a violation of the Divine law. It hath been observed, that divorces should only be admitted for the cause of fornication, being expressly prohibited in all other cases: but it may be added, that marriages contracted between those near relations, whom the Lord for the wisest reasons hath prohibited to intermarry, are in themselves justly deemed invalid, and may properly be dissolved: in all other cases, "whom God hath joined together man ought not," on any pretence whatsoever, "to put asunder:" and the fewer restrictions to marriage are added to those expressly made in the Scripture, the better will the true interests of mankind in every order of society be provided for. That polygamy also is expressly prohibited by the sacred Scriptures, must appear to every unbiassed mind, who carefully compares together the passages referred to, (Gen. ii. 24; Mal. ii. 14—16; Matt. xix. 3—9; Mark x. 11; 1 Cor. vii. 2—4). The inter-marriage of the professed worshippers of God with idolaters, and other open despisers of him, and that of believers with those that are evidently strangers to true godliness, are prohibited, at least in all ordinary cases; and the infringement of these prohibitions has in all ages been extremely injurious to the cause of religion, (1 Cor. vii. 39; 2 Cor. vi. 14—16). This may lead us back to our more immediate subject; for the duty of Christians in respect of this relation commences before they actually enter into it. When they deem it most conducive to their best interests and to their usefulness to marry, their principles will lead them to acknowledge God in so important a concern, to consult his word, to pray for his direction and blessing, and to regard his providential dispensations in their determination. They cannot consistently treat this most momentous matter with a childish levity, or hearken to the corrupt suggestions of worldly convenience, avarice, or irrational attachment, or to the fascinations of wit, beauty, &c., in preference to piety. A suitable companion through the residue of life, who may especially be helpful in forwarding spiritual improvement, and concur in every pious plan of family religion, and the education of children, should before all things be sought for: though a subordinate regard to situation in life, habits, prospects, and natural disposition, may very properly be admitted. In short, the Lord, who knoweth all things, should be constantly and earnestly intreated to direct the choice and deter-

Digitized by Google

mination, and to give the blessing; in order to which the advice of pious and prudent persons, and the judgment of affectionate parents and relations, should be attended to, as far as the word of God consists with their conclusions. When the union hath taken place, the married persons should consider each other, not only as the objects of their own choice, but also of the Lord's choice for them, and should constantly desire and pray to be perfectly satisfied with it. From that moment, the eye, the ear, the imagination, the heart, must be carefully closed against all other persons, and every word and action cautiously shunned, which may excite an uneasy thought in each other's mind, or which may give the least reason to suspect an abatement or change of affection. They should remember from the first, that they are both sinners, and must expect to be sufferers; that they are absolutely insufficient to each other's happiness; and that whilst the Lord may render them instrumental to each other's comfort and welfare, they must expect to be also sources of anxiety and sorrow to one another in many respects, and at last be separated by the stroke of death. That idolatrous, selfish, and carnal love, therefore, to which nature leads, should be steadily counteracted, and grace should be sought to change it gradually for a more rational, subordinate, and spiritual affection: otherwise it will at length either abate, be turned into disgust, transferred to another object, or prove the source of the keenest anguish. The mind should also be prepared by every consideration, for all that forbearance, sympathy, mutual concession, and self-denial, without which the most promising prospects of connubial happiness will soon be covered with dark clouds; and it should never be forgotten, that there is much amiss in every human character, and much alloy in all earthly comforts; for too high expectations are the bane of our satisfaction in almost every situation.

When both parties are real Christians, their reciprocal duties will be comparatively easy and pleasant; yet even in this case the preceding cautions will not be found unnecessary. The general rules of conduct for the wife, and for the husband, are laid down by the apostle, with reference to the union between Christ and his espoused church, from whom all our motives must be deduced, and who in one way or other is our perfect example in every thing, (Eph. v. 22—33). This allusion instructs the "wife to submit herself to her own husband, as unto the Lord," for his sake, and as the church is subject to him, the preserver and Saviour of the whole body. As therefore the Lord has placed the husband to be the head of authority, protection, and counsel to the wife; so she ought "to be subject to him in all things;" that is, provided nothing be commanded contrary to the will of God. The example of the true church shows, that the wife should render obedience willingly, from love and gratitude, with alacrity, and a steady desire of promoting the advantage, credit, and comfort of her husband, even when this is connected with such things as thwart her own inclinations, and seem to be contrary to her own interests in less matters: it teaches her to honour and reverence her husband, and to be very reluctant to discover his infirmities, or induce his frown; to consider herself as no longer her own, to be at her own disposal, but as her husband's; to make it the business of her life, in subserviency to the glory and will of God, to promote his happiness; and especially to soothe him when discomposed by the various troubles of life, to accommodate herself to his station, to avoid every expense that may involve him, to concur in every prudent regulation to support their family, and above all to assist him with her prayers and endeavours in every part of personal and family religion. On the other hand, the husband may learn from this condescending pattern, "to love his wife as his own body," notwithstanding her defects and misconduct; to treat her with the most persevering kindness and affectionate sympathy; to endure hardship, and meet danger, in order to protect and provide for her; to employ his authority wholly for her good, and especially in promoting her sanctification and salvation; to admit her to a full participation of all the advantages attached to his station in life;

Digitized by Google

to soothe all her sorrows with a tender attention, and a self-denying endeavour to alleviate them; not to despise her because of infirmities, nor to allow others to despise or injure her, "but to give honour to her as the weaker vessel;" to be as careful not to give her needless pain or uneasiness, as he would be not to wound his own flesh; and to give up his own humour, nay even sometimes his reasonable inclination, rather than ruffle her temper, or give her umbrage, when by any means a temporary peevishness hath been excited, and so to behave in all things, that she may find it easy to respect and esteem him. In general, both of them are required to watch over each other, to tend each other in sickness, to alleviate one another's cares and sorrows, to pray for and with one another, and to avoid whatever may hinder those prayers. Above all, each of them must be sure to remember to be most attentive to their several duties when the other is most deficient; for if only one party at once indulge a wrong temper, or fall into misconduct, few serious interruptions of domestic harmony would follow.

To these general hints a few more special may be added. Sometimes it is discovered after marriage, that a mistake hath been fallen into as to the *religious* character of the person with whom the union has been formed. In this trying case, great care must be taken, that the mind be not alienated, or amicable intercourse interrupted on that account; that no disgust be excited by reproach, or any expression importing repentance of the union. On the other hand, wisdom and grace should be immediately and earnestly sought, to enable the party to bear the cross cheerfully; to win upon the other by kindness and attention; to induce a concurrence in family worship, and attendance on the means of grace; and to use a prudent caution, that the circumstances may only be a cross, and not a snare to the soul. By whatever means a pious person is thus united with an unbeliever, the same cautions are in a measure needful, and others may be added. The apostle hath expressly directed, that believers should not on any such account withdraw from their partners, but should abide with them, in hopes of being instrumental to their salvation, (1 Cor. vii. 12—17). In this case, the wife, whose husband "obeys not the word," should endeavour "to win him without the word," not so much by frequent and earnest discourse on religious subjects, (which ought to be introduced very cautiously, modestly, and affectionately), as by a "chaste conversation, coupled with fear," or an union of circumspect fidelity and respectful submission; and to render herself agreeable to him, not by the vain decorations of elegant and costly attire, but "by the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and the exercise of all those holy tempers, the seat of which is in the heart, and which are "in the sight of God of great value." In such circumstances, it may be advisable to bear unkind usage or neglect with patience, or to wait for opportunities of mild expostulation, in humble prayer and persevering submission. Thus the cross may be lightened, which a contrary conduct commonly increases; and the best method taken of "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour," and of giving an unbeliever an affecting proof that the truths he rejects are most excellent in their nature and tendency. Many of the same rules may properly be adopted by the pious husband, whose wife dislikes his religion; but in the superior relation there may be a propriety in more explicitly and frequently proposing religious conversation; in urging attendance on the means of grace, and concurrence in family worship. In both cases, such compliances as cannot be conscientiously made, should be firmly, but mildly refused; and in proportion to the degree in which a decided conduct is adopted, where the will of God is concerned, an obliging and yielding disposition should be manifested, where personal inclination only is at stake, or where the matter is rather expedient than obligatory.

But there is a case of still greater difficulty, viz. when a believer has married an ungodly person, after having been competently acquainted with the truth and will of God in this respect. In general, such persons flatter themselves with the hope of being the instrument of good to the object of their

Digitized by Google

choice, though the reverse is by far the more common effect. Yet this hope should not afterwards be abandoned: but deep humiliation, with earnest prayers to a merciful God to pardon and to overrule for the best what cannot now be disannulled, should be considered as above all things needful: to this the observance of the foregoing rules should be added; and the consideration of the sin by which the cross hath been incurred, should constitute an additional motive to persevering patience, meekness, and kindness, even in return for harsh treatment; and in one way or other the Lord will support, comfort, and rescue such humble penitents, and make all to work together for good to their souls.

These hints indeed are very inadequate to the full discussion of so copious and important a subject; but they may throw some light upon the believer's path, who reads them with prayer, and compares them with the sacred Scriptures.

II. We proceed to consider the reciprocal duties of parents and children. Some observations have already been made on this subject, (Essay IV), but a few hints must here be subjoined, beginning with the duty of children to their parents, which will finish the first part of this Essay. The apostle exhorts "children to obey their parents in the Lord," in obedience to the will, for the honour of the gospel, from grateful love to the name, and in imitation of the example of the Lord Jesus, this being also right in itself, and required by the holy law of God. The general grounds and nature of this duty have been stated; it remains for us to consider it, as practised by a believer from evangelical motives. If such a young disciple have the blessing of pious parents, in honouring and obeying them, he will commonly honour and obey the Lord: and gratitude for the spiritual benefits derived to him by means of their instructions, example, and prayers, will be an additional incitement to a respectful, submissive, and obliging deportment; to a steady concern for their comfort, ease, interest, and reputation; and to a self-denying, frugal, and diligent endeavour to ward off want and distress from their old age, as pious Joseph maintained his father and family just as many years in his old age, as his father had maintained him in his youth. In this case, it will be peculiarly proper to bear with their infirmities, and conceal them from others; to submit to inconveniences and restraints, in compliance with their wishes, and to soothe their sorrows; to consult them in every undertaking as long as they live; to pay a deference to their opinion, even when it is in a measure unreasonable, if it do not interfere with other duties; and never to grieve them by a contrary behaviour, without a very satisfactory reason, and with the most evident reluctance. On the other hand, it sometimes happens that pious children have parents, whom they cannot but consider as strangers to the power of godliness; in which case, it must be a leading desire of their hearts to win them over to the doctrine and grace of the Lord Jesus: but in order to accomplish this purpose, it is peculiarly needful to watch against a hasty zeal, and a violent spirit. They should expect to be opposed in their religious pursuits; to be assailed by arguments and authority, and perhaps by reproaches and menaces; to be restrained by various methods from attending divine ordinances; and to be allured into such companies and diversions as are inconsistent with their profession: they should therefore beg of God to give them the meekness of wisdom, as well as a steadfast mind; that they may not refuse obedience in frivolous or doubtful matters, or in a harsh and disobliging manner, but where evident duty requires it, and with calm and mild declarations of the grounds on which they proceed: thus it will appear that a Scriptural conscientiousness (and not caprice, self-will, or self-conceit) compel them to act in this manner; and in proportion as this is done, redoubled diligence and self-denial should be used, to oblige their parents in all other things. In general, children are not required to preach to their parents; at least, every word should be spoken in modesty, tenderness, candour, and unassuming gentleness: and they should rather aim to induce them to hear sermons, to read books, or to converse with

Digitized by Google

pious and prudent Christians, than themselves to give instructions, or engage in arguments with them, except in very particular circumstances; for parents will seldom become docile scholars to their own children, especially if they teach in magisterial and reproving language. The most conclusive argument they can use consists in an uniform, conscientious conduct, an obliging attention, silent submission to undeserved rebukes, diligence in business, fidelity to every trust reposed in them, and a disinterested regard to the temporal advantage of the whole family. When a young person uniformly acts in this manner, he will have opportunities of speaking or writing a few words with weight and propriety, which, being joined with persevering prayer, may at length be crowned with the desired success; whilst a contrary conduct will close a parent's ear against the choicest arguments, and most zealous discourse. But however that may be, in this way he will adorn the gospel, and will be sure of meeting with the gracious acceptance and blessing of his heavenly Father.

ESSAY XXI.

On the Believer's Attention to Relative Duties.

(In Continuation of the preceding Essay.)

HAVING given some brief hints on the conduct to which the principles of the gospel will influence the true believer in the filial relation, we must subjoin a few observations on the reciprocal duties of parents, whom reason and revelation unite in appointing to be the guardians of their offspring, in respect of their present and future welfare. Their attention therefore, must not only commence from the time when they actually become parents, but many things should previously be arranged, with reference to the probability of this important event; *important*, because every human being that is brought into existence must be completely happy or miserable to all eternity. From the very first, conscientious parents will do nothing for the sake of ease, indulgence, or other selfish purpose, which may endanger the life, limbs, senses, constitution, understanding, or morals of their children: they will personally attend to every thing relating to them, as far as they can; and will be very careful not to entrust them with such persons as are merely influenced by worldly interest in what they do for them. They will perceive the importance of inuring them early to action, application, and observation, and of storing their minds, as they become capable of it, with information on every subject which can conduce to render them useful members of the community. They will endeavour to accustom them to such things as are of beneficial tendency, to preserve them from habits of indolence or self-indulgence, and to prevent their forming improper connections. Many difficulties, indeed, must be encountered in adhering to such a plan of education, and the success will not always answer the expectations which have been excited by it; but more may be done than many parents so much as attempt; and the general education of both sexes at present, seems calculated to answer any purpose, rather than that of regulating the judgments and improving the minds of the rising generation, of preserving their principles and morals from contamination, and of qualifying them for usefully filling up the station in life for which they are designed.

The word of God directs parents to rule their children during their tender years, by compulsion, and to repress their self-will and rebellious spirits by correction: that they may be early habituated to obedience and submission to authority, which will be of the greatest advantage to them during

Digitized by Google

their whole lives, both in secular and religious matters; for the more any man studies human nature, and repeats the actual experiment, the fuller will be his conviction, that all attempts to educate children without correction, and to treat them as rational and independent agents, before they are able to use their reason or liberty, arise from forgetfulness of their innate depravity, and oppose the wisdom of man to that of God: and let modern manners evince with what success this has been attended, (Prov. xiii. 24; xix. 18; xxii. 15; xxiii. 13, 14; xxix. 17; Heb. xii. 5—11). Chastisement should indeed be inflicted at an early period, dispassionately, and in moderation, yet sufficient eventually to attain the end proposed by it, viz. to establish the parent's authority over the mind of the child. It is therefore generally improper to contest a trivial matter, for that will either give the correction the appearance of undue severity, or induce the parent to desist before the child has completely submitted. The frequency, severity, and passion, with which children have been corrected, and the bad effects occasioned by these *abuses*, have prejudiced numbers against the *use* of any correction; but to argue from the *abuse* of any thing against the *use* of it, is universally allowed to be bad logic: and if children were early taught in this manner to know that the parent would be obeyed, when he gave a decided command, correction need not be often repeated, and much less severity, all circumstances considered, would be requisite in education than is generally used. For when children become reasonable creatures, that authority which correction has established, may be maintained by arguments, reproofs, commendations, and expostulations: whereas, too many leave their indulged children without correction, till age and habit have confirmed them in stubborn self-will, and then, by an unseasonable severity, complete their ruin; for, being exasperated by their ingratitude, they find fault with their very attempts to please them; and by harsh language and usage drive them into bad company and destructive courses; to which case the apostle especially referred, when he said, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged," (Eph. vi. 4; Col. iii. 21). On the contrary, parents ought to use every method to render their children, as they grow up, easy and happy in their company, and confident of a favourable reception in every attempt to please them; for this tends exceedingly to keep them out of temptation, to improve their minds, and to render the parental authority of wisdom and love respectable and amiable in their eyes: and if they can allure their children to *choose* them for companions, counsellors, and friends in all their undertakings, a most important point indeed will be carried.

It is also incumbent on parents to bring up their children in that manner, and (if they can do it consistent with other duties) to make that moderate provision for them, which may, at all events, enable them to live comfortably in society, without being a burthen to others, or to themselves. The Christian cannot consistently seek great things for his family, or be desirous of advancing them much above his own rank in life; but he will judge it best (if the Lord will), that they should not be depressed very much below it, at least by his fault; for that condition in which men have been brought up is generally the safest for them.

But the principles of the gospel will especially influence those who are actuated by them, to desire the blessings of salvation for their beloved offspring. This will induce them to recommend them to God in fervent, constant prayer, from the time that they receive their being; and to instil instruction into their minds as soon as they become capable of receiving it. They will early begin to store their memories with wholesome words; to lead their attention to the simpler parts of the Holy Scripture; and to impress them with a sense of their relation to God, and to an eternal state (especially by means of family worship): to bring them under the public and private instructions of faithful ministers; to watch for opportunities of speaking seriously to them, and of inquiring what they have learned; and to encourage them in proposing questions on religious subjects, by answering such as they can

Digitized by Google

with propriety, (Exod. xii. 26—28; Deut. vi. 6—9; Psalm lxxviii. 6—8). They will also endeavour to keep them from all places and companies, and to remove out of their way all books, &c., by which their principles may be corrupted, their imaginations polluted, or their passions inflamed, even as they would lay poison out of their reach. They will more decidedly reprove vice or impiety, than any childish neglect or waywardness; and avoid all converse or behaviour in their presence, which may counteract the tendency of such instructions, or sanction the pride, avarice, sensuality, love of grandeur, envy, or malignity of their nature.

It is peculiarly incumbent on religious parents to convince their children, as they approach to maturity, not only that they act in all other things conscientiously, but also that they are more attentive to their comfort and interest, and more ready to forgive their faults, than irreligious parents would be, though they cannot tolerate their vices, or concur in exceptionable plans of advancing or enriching them, because the Scripture holds forth such alarming examples to warn men not to gratify their children by dishonouring God, or injuring their neighbours, (1 Sam. ii. 22—36). It behoves parents however to remember the time when they were young, and not to thwart the inclinations of their children when grown up, without substantial reasons, lest they should throw snares in their way: they should rather endeavour to manifest a disposition to concur in every thing conducive to their satisfaction, if it can be done consistently; that by thus encouraging their confidence in them, they may have the salutary influence of experienced counsellors, when the direct exercise of authority would endanger opposition. In particular, they certainly should rather aim to guide, caution, and advise them, in respect to marriage, than to compel or restrain them in an absolute manner; remembering, that peace of mind, a good conscience, domestic harmony, and a connection favourable to piety, conduce more to happiness, even in this world, than wealth, or a confluence of all earthly distinctions. Many directions might be added, in respect of the conduct to be adopted by parents, when children appear to be under serious impressions; but the subject is too copious to be discussed in this place.

This is the most important perhaps of all relative duties; and the neglect of it is productive of the most fatal consequences: for, besides those parents who in various ways are accessary to the murder of the souls of their own offspring, even they, who seem to regard other parts of Scripture, often overlook the command "to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," (Eph. vi. 4); and either by neglect leave their minds like an uncultivated field, or by example and harsh treatment prejudice them against the gospel, or indiscreetly lead them into such distorted views of it as are of fatal tendency. Indeed the methods are innumerable by which parents fail of their duty in this respect; and whilst numbers act as if they did not much care, whether their offspring were happy or miserable hereafter, it is to be feared that few, if any, are free from blame in this important concern.

It may here be proper to add, that they, who in any way undertake to bring up the children of others, are required in many respects to perform the duties of parents to them: and on the other hand, such young persons owe a measure of that respect, gratitude, obedience, and affection to them, which have been described as the duties of children to their parents: and this case is not altered, even when elder brothers or sisters are the persons on whom this charge has devolved. In like manner, the other superior relations are entitled to a measure of filial deference and attention; and ought to perform many parts of the parental office to their junior relatives, especially if their parents be dead, or incapable of performing it, or be wholly inattentive to them; and they have the power of bringing them up, without burthening strangers.

III. The duties of brethren in the same family towards each other, should not be wholly omitted on this occasion. The love which is supposed to subsist among such endeared relations, is the Scriptural standard of that pure

Digitized by Google

and fervent affection which Christians ought to bear one towards another: the former therefore should not be treated as an instinctive propensity, but regulated by precept as a Christian duty. The children of one family, when they live much together, cannot, in the present state of human nature, fail to meet with many little affronts and injuries among themselves, which may interrupt domestic harmony, unless great circumspection be used not to give offence even by rudeness and uncourteous familiarity; and a constant endeavour be made to oblige, and to render each other easy and comfortable, joined with persevering forbearance, forgiveness, and various concessions. For want of these attentions, perpetual bickerings and lasting animosities supplant brotherly love; and they who should be, through life, faithful and tender friends, are often more estranged from each other than from almost any other persons: of such bad consequences are the competitions, envies, and jealousies that take place in families; and so careful ought parents to be, not to lay a foundation for them by an injudicious partiality, and not to treat them as matters of no moment, (Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4; Prov. xviii. 19). Moreover, they who associate so much together, as young persons in this relation commonly do, must have many opportunities of influencing each other's principles and conduct: these are frequently made a very bad use of; and false principles are often instilled, and encouragement given to various things contrary to their duty to God, their parents, or others, even where no gross immorality or impiety appear. But that love which evangelical principles increase and direct, will not only be disinterested, conceding, self-denying, liberal, and peaceful, but prudent, pious, and holy: and they who are influenced by it, will aim, by seasonable caution, counsel, or expostulation, enforced by kindness and a consistent example, and accompanied by fervent prayer, to guard such dear relations from snares and dangers, to instil good principles, and to win them to attend to the concerns of their souls. Nor will it be improper in this case to speak more plainly, and debate the matter more fully with them, (especially those who are younger than themselves), than they should do with parents or superior relations: and it is very common for the Lord to bless such endeavours, and thus to make them the foundation of the most permanent friendship. The duties of the other collateral relations who dwell much together, are in a great measure the same.

IV. The reciprocal duties of servants and masters are the last of those that belong to domestic life. The condition of servants differs widely at present from what it was when the New Testament was penned: for then they were generally slaves, the property of their masters; whose service they could not leave, but who might dispose of them as they pleased, or punish them with almost uncontrolled severity. This could never consist with the law of "loving our neighbour as ourselves;" though it pleased the Lord to tolerate and regulate it, in the *judicial* law of Moses, (as he did polygamy and divorces); and the state of things, at the first opening of the Christian dispensation, rendered it improper for the ministers of religion directly to attack a system, which was inseparable from the foundations of every government then existing in the world. This difference, however, gives the greater energy to the exhortations which the sacred writers address to servants professing the gospel: except, that they may now leave those places, where they are ill used, or in which they are restrained from attending on Divine ordinances, or hallowing the Lord's day. Yet this liberty should be used with much caution: for every place has its disadvantages, and every master (as well as servant) his faults; and men often incur much detriment, and forfeit manifold advantages, through impatience under a single inconvenience: especially servants sometimes purchase a trivial increase of wages at an enormous price. The believer, therefore, "who is called, being a servant," or who finds it necessary for him to enter upon this kind of life, should remember, that the Lord hath constituted these different situations in society, for the same reasons as he hath allotted the several members in

Digitized by Google

the body their distinct offices, viz. for the common benefit of the whole: and that he hath chosen servitude as the best situation for him; to which appointment he requires his unreserved submission. He should also consider the place in which he lives, as the post for the present assigned him, which he must not relinquish without substantial reasons, and fervent prayer for direction; and if this be determined on, he ought to perform the duties of his place without remission, whilst he continues in it. If he want a place, he should seek a suitable one from the Lord, in dependence on his providence and promises, and prefer that which affords the greatest advantages for religious improvement, though it be somewhat more laborious or less lucrative. And here it may be proper to remind both servants and masters, that though there are many vain talkers and deceivers, yet there are also true Christians: it is therefore the height of absurdity for believers to prefer the society of ungodly persons in any relation, because they have been disgusted and ill used by hypocrites. Men do not throw away bank-notes because they have been cheated by forged bills; and no disappointment should cause them to despair of finding the far more valuable treasure of a Christian master or servant, unless any one should fancy himself to be the only true Christian in the land.

If pious servants be favoured with a situation in a religious family, they should remember, that equality in Christian privileges by no means implies equality in domestic life; instead therefore of behaving with an unbecoming familiarity, or neglecting their masters' orders "as if they despised them;" they should "count them worthy of all honour, and rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit," (1 Tim. vi. 1—5). And as they are conscious of much imperfection in themselves, they ought to make allowances for it in them also. They should value the privilege of family worship very highly, even though it be not in all respects conducted exactly to their mind; and they ought so to order all their business, that it may not interfere with it, or with the regular observance of the Lord's day. Should pious servants find themselves placed in families, in which they cannot but deem the profession of religion to be vain; they ought not hastily to mention their opinion, or speak about it with harshness; on the contrary, they should aim by a good example to exhibit the difference between the form and the power of godliness. Even when they live in families where ignorance and ungodliness prevail, they ought not to speak freely on the faults of their masters, or assume the office of an authoritative teacher; for no man would be pleased to have a spy or a reprover in the character of a servant. Yet the Christian, thus situated, will especially aim to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour," by cheerful obedience to every lawful command, diligence in all the duties of his station, and faithfulness to the trust reposed in him; remembering that his maintenance and wages are the price his master pays for his time and skill. Consistency will require him to prefer the credit, advantage, or comfort of his master or family, to his own ease or indulgence, and especially to manifest sympathy and tenderness in times of sickness and affliction; to speak exact truth on all occasions; not to purloin, or join with those who defraud his master in small matters; or even connive at such petty dishonesty, however sanctioned by custom, or whatever contempt and ill-will he may incur by his conscientiousness. It will dispose him to strict frugality, and to see that no waste be made; and also to consult his master's inclination in the manner of doing his work. If he be justly blamed, he will learn to bear it quietly, owning himself wrong, and doing better another time; if he be blamed without cause, or rebuked with harshness, (not to speak of more outrageous treatment), he will endeavour to recollect the Scriptural rule "of not answering again," (the neglect of which is productive of innumerable evils, especially to servants themselves): (Tit. ii. 9, 10:) and that the apostle says, "servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward," (1 Pet. ii. 18—25); for though such usage may excite his passions, he will

Digitized by Google

not on recollection say, "I do well to be angry;" but will consider him, who "when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not;" for we are called to copy his example, to show the reality and excellency of our religion, by doing well and suffering patiently; and however such a servant may be neglected by an austere, injurious, earthly master, yet he shall certainly receive a gracious recompense from the Lord, (Eph. vi. 5—8; Col. iii. 22—25). Thus his principles teach him not to be an eye-servant and a man-pleaser, attentive to his business only in his master's presence; but in singleness of heart to do the will of God, and to refer every thing to the honour of the Lord Jesus, and the credit of his gospel; not so much fearing man's displeasure, as disgracing the cause of evangelical religion by his misconduct.

Such habitual behaviour, in a servant professing the gospel, will not only conduce to his own interest, credit, and comfort, but will procure attention to any serious remark he may make, or commendation he may give to a book or a preacher: and this will discountenance vice and impiety; nay, perhaps it may dispose some to examine the nature of that religion, which produces such excellent fruits: whilst violent and zealous disputes for doctrines, in him whose conduct is disobliging and impertinent, not to say slothful and dishonest, expose to contempt the very truths for which he contends. The same principles will also lead a man to follow after peace with his fellow servants: he will not indeed silently see his master defrauded, or join with others in riot: but he will avoid a morose and invidious conduct; not reporting, or even protesting against trifles; but only against manifest evils: endeavouring by kindness, patience when ridiculed, and forgiveness when injured, to win their attention to calm discourse on Divine things. He will also take care never to seek his own interest by countenancing children in misconduct to their parents, or each other; though he will oblige them for their good. He will not treat indigent relations or dependents with galling neglect, or attend on them with grudging. If he be obliged to refuse obedience to an improper command, he will do it with mildness and respect. If his time be too much taken up on the Lord's day, he will endeavour to redeem what remains more diligently; and if he be constrained to leave his place, he will be careful how he needlessly lessens his master's character in his own vindication. The same rules, with circumstantial alterations, suit the case of apprentices and labourers; and all who are employed by others, according to the degree and nature of the trust reposed in them, (Gen. xxiv.)

On the other hand, masters are also instructed in their duties, by directions and examples, in the holy Scriptures. The Christian's principles will influence him to consider true piety as an invaluable accession to the character of a servant who suits him in other respects; and to seek the blessing with fervent prayer; and by making his place desirable to such persons. If he be thus favoured, he will endeavour to behave to his servant as a brother in the faith; he will make proper allowances for mistakes and defects; and value a servant, who, on the whole, is faithful, upright, diligent, and peaceable, though he be not without faults; knowing how much the comfort of his family and the best interests of his children depend on such domestics. If he meet with bad servants, he will strive to repress his anger, to avoid reproaches, and to behave well to them, till he can change them. If his servants suit him in other respects, but are strangers to religion, he will use all proper means of conciliating their minds to it. In general, such a master will not expect more work from his servants than they can well perform; nor deprive them of time for relaxation and retirement. He will deem it his duty to give them adequate wages, and to make their situation as comfortable as he can. He will provide them with things suitable to their station, when in health; and be very tender to them in sickness; procuring them help in their work under slighter indispositions, and proper advice, if he can in more acute sickness, (Matt. viii. 1—9.) He will not think himself justified by custom, in turning away a *faithful* servant, by sending him to an hos-

Digitized by Google

pital, because he cannot do his work, if he have it in his power to prevent it: but will consider, that he who has the benefit of his skill and labour when well, ought to submit to trouble and expense for him when sick. Nay, if he can afford it, he will copy the example of the Lord, in respect of the aged; as he does not forsake *his* servants in their old age, or when their strength faileth. "Remembering that he also hath a master in heaven," he will consult their interests, and be a sincere and faithful friend to them, in whatever may tend to their comfortable settlement in life. He will not keep them at a disdainful distance, or answer them with harshness, even when they are mistaken or unreasonable; nor express discouraging suspicions of them, or descant on their faults to others. The same principles will influence him to consider the souls of his domestics as entrusted to his care. He will, therefore, order his affairs so, as may give them most leisure and opportunity for hallowing the Lord's day; and use his authority in enforcing that observance, (Gen. xviii. 19.) He will read the Scriptures to them, and join with them in family prayer; he will arrange his daily plans in subserviency to that grand concern, and avoid whatever may prejudice their minds against it. He will watch over their morals and principles, and exclude from them infectious companions, as much as possible. Thus he will make family religion the cement of family peace, and not only aim to influence his servants by love to willing obedience, but to give them cause to bless the day when they entered his doors, both in this world and for ever, (Acts x. 7, 22; Eph. vi. 9; Col. iv. 1.) Many other relative duties might be discussed; but this topic has already occupied a full proportion of the limits prescribed to these Essays. Subjects are required to obey the lawful commands of magistrates; to respect their persons and reverence their authority, as God's ordinance; not to speak evil of them, to pay them tribute conscientiously; to pray for them, and to study to be quiet and mind the duties of their station. The duty of rulers and magistrates, as far as it falls under our plan, will be mentioned in an Essay on the improvement of talents. The poor should behave, with respect to the rich, without envying, coveting, or repining. The rich should be courteous, condescending, compassionate and liberal to the poor; and set them an edifying example of piety. The young should behave with modesty, deference, and attention to the old; especially to such as are godly, however poor they may be. The aged should temper gravity and seriousness with cheerfulness and kindness in their conduct to the young. The faithful pastor will study from the Scriptures his duty to his flock; and the consistent Christian will, even in this relaxed day, consider himself as bound to honour, love, and attend to his faithful pastor. In one word, true Christianity, will influence every man to fill up his station, in the family, the church, and the community, to the glory of God, and the common benefit of the whole: and all that comes short of this is the effect of remaining contrariety to its heavenly principles, in the judgement and dispositions of true Christians, and among those who name the name of Christ, but depart not from iniquity.

ESSAY XXII.

On the Christian's Improvement of his Talents.

When the humble penitent has obtained peace of conscience by faith in Christ, and enjoys a prevailing hope of eternal life; he will be disposed, in proportion as his views are distinct and consistent, to inquire seriously by what means he may best glorify the God of his salvation, and do the most good to mankind during the remainder of his days? For "the love of Christ,"

Digitized by Google

(in dying on the cross to deliver sinners from the wrath to come, and to purchase for them everlasting felicity; and in calling him, as he hopes, to partake of so inestimable a blessing) "will constrain him to live no longer to himself, but to Him who died for him and rose again." This will induce him to consider very attentively, what advantages or opportunities his situation affords him, of promoting the honour of the Redeemer's name, the peace, purity, and enlargement of his kingdom, the comfort and edification of his people, and the welfare, temporal and eternal, of the human species. These opportunities and advantages are commonly called talents, from the parable which our Lord spoke on this subject, (Matt. xxv. 14—30); and doubtless this portion of Scripture, and that coincident with it, (Luke xix. 11—27), relate entirely to this matter; for they do not point out the method of salvation, as if the improvement of natural powers or common grace could merit or procure special grace (as some have confusedly argued); for special grace produces the inclination and disposition to use natural powers, and all other advantages aright; which all men who are destitute of it are wholly disposed to abuse, as far as selfish principles will permit them. But there are a variety of endowments and opportunities that may be improved to the best of purposes, but which wicked men employ in gratifying their base lusts, to the increase of their own guilt, and the injury of all around them; and which mere formal professors of religion, who harbour hard thoughts of God, and a secret dislike to his service, as it were, bury in the earth. Of these, the true disciple of Christ will avail himself; and by "occupying with the talent entrusted to him," he will both prove his own faith to be living and his love sincere, and also become as "a light in the world," and "the salt of the earth," (Matt. v. 13—16; 2 Cor. viii. 7, 8; James ii. 14—26). Every man has some measure of these advantages afforded him, according to the appointment of infinite wisdom, which also assigns to each person his station in the church and the community: and if a man profess the gospel, the use he makes of these advantages is one of the most decisive tests, by which the sincerity of that profession may be ascertained, and the degree of his grace estimated. But the *improvement*, and not the number of his talents, is to be considered in this decision: "he that is faithful in little, is faithful also in much," (Luke xvi. 9—12): and whilst the servant to whom many talents have been entrusted may be more extensively useful, he that hath improved a very small proportion may be equally favoured of his Lord; and the poor widow's two mites may be more evidential of sincere love and fervent zeal, than the liberal donations of the affluent.

Almost every thing may be considered as a talent; for a good or a bad use may be made of every natural endowment, or providential appointment; or they may remain unoccupied, through inactivity and selfishness. Time, health, vigour of body with the power of exertion and enduring fatigue, the natural and acquired abilities of the mind, skill in any lawful art or science, the capacity for close mental application, the gift of speech, and that of speaking with fluency and propriety, and in a convincing, attractive, or persuasive manner; wealth, influence, or authority; a man's situation in the church, the community, or relative life; and the various occurrences which make way for him to attempt any thing of a beneficial tendency; these, and many others, that can scarce be enumerated, are talents which the consistent Christian will improve to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. Nay, this improvement of talents procures an increase of them, and gives a man an accession of influence, and an accumulating power of doing good: because it tends to establish his reputation for prudence, piety, integrity, sincerity, and disinterested benevolence; it gradually forms him to an habitual readiness to engage in beneficent designs, and to conduct them in a gentle, unobtrusive, and unassuming manner; it disposes others to regard him with increasing confidence and affection, and to approach him with satisfaction; and it procures for him the countenance of many persons, whose assistance he can employ in accomplishing his own salutary purposes. For, as

Digitized by Google

far as we are consistent in our views of our calling and business in the world, we shall, both in the concerns of our own salvation and in endeavouring to be useful, imitate the skilful mariner, who always keeps his port in mind, and gets forward in his voyage, by using every wind that blows to help him as far as it can be done, and avails himself to the utmost of every circumstance that arises from gales, currents, &c., to accomplish the purpose at which he perpetually aims. But we shall perhaps obtain a more distinct view of the subject, by selecting a specimen of these talents, and the improvement of which they are capable.

I. Power and authority constitute a most important trust, committed by the Great Ruler of the Universe to some of the human race, for the benefit of the whole, and of every individual, as far as consistent with it. In one sense or other, the Scripture represents all power as derived from God, and all rulers as the ministers of his providence in governing the world: who must all render an account to him, both for the manner in which they acquired dominion, and the use they make of it. Waving, therefore, all questions on these subjects, it suffices to say, that too many, who *in any way* have exercised authority over their brethren, have made a very bad use of it. Ambition, vain-glory, lust of dominion, rapacity, caprice, envy, furious anger or dire revenge, superstition or impiety, have often influenced them to employ their power in exciting and waging bloody wars, destructive to their subjects as well as to foreigners; in oppressing and burthening the poor; in favouring the exactions and oppressions which they ought to have crushed; in protecting and advancing the men whom they should have punished; in harassing those whom it was their duty to have protected; in persecuting their peaceable subjects for their religious opinions: and thus in various ways increasing the miseries, which they were exalted on purpose to remedy. There have also been some, who, as princes or magistrates, have upon the whole behaved *negatively* well: they have not waged unnecessary wars, or molested their subjects by oppressions or persecutions: but have been peaceably contented with the splendour, dignity, and pleasures of their station, and have left it to their servants to keep the machine of government in motion. They have, therefore, done far less mischief than some others: but they have not done the good incumbent on them, nor prevented the evil which has been done, perhaps under the sanction of their names, and which they ought to have strenuously opposed. "These have buried their talent in the earth." There have also been certain rulers and magistrates, who from natural principles have made, in some measure, a salutary use of their authority: they have enacted good laws, and administered justice with a considerable degree of impartiality: they have taken care to preserve their country from foreign enemies, and have yet avoided war as far as they consistently could, from a wise preference of the blessings of peace, above the advantages arising from the most splendid victories: they have relieved the people from burthensome taxes, and defended the poor from oppressions, and the pious from persecutions; and, by thus providing for the temporal welfare of the state, they have obtained the endearing title of "Fathers to their people." This conduct the real Christian, when placed in authority, will carefully imitate from higher motives: but he will unite with it an uniform endeavour to render his whole administration subservient to the interests of true religion; and this constitutes the proper improvement of his talents. Not only "the king as supreme," but all his counsellors and ministers of state, the members of the legislature, and the magistrates, from the highest to the lowest, have a degree of power and authority vested in them by the great Ruler and Judge of the world, and to him they must be accountable for the use which they make of it. As they are placed in a conspicuous situation, multitudes scrutinize their conduct, either to censure or to imitate it; consequently their example becomes proportionably more important. This will be an additional motive to the true Christian, to walk circumspectly and accurately; to shew himself a pattern of a reverential regard to the name, the day, the word, the

Digitized by Google

house, and the ordinances of God; of sobriety, temperance, moderation, and beneficence in the use of outward things; of equity, punctuality, sincerity, and fidelity, in all his transactions, promises, and engagements: of meekness, condescension, courteousness, kindness, and compassion in all his deportment; and of attention to his domestics, and to all the duties of relative life. He will endeavour to unite wisdom, firmness, and justice, with candour and clemency in his public conduct; to manifest a disinterested, impartial spirit; to be the patron of the poor, the oppressed, and the friendless; without respecting the persons, or fearing the *unmerited* displeasure of the rich and powerful; and to cleave to what is right, without warping, even when his conduct excites the censures and clamours of an ill-judging multitude. His principles will influence him "to love righteousness and hate iniquity;" to promote to the utmost the peace of nations, the good order of the community, and the temporal advantage of all ranks of men in it. But they will also dispose him to render all this subservient to still more important purposes; and to aim "to adorn" and recommend "the doctrine of God our Saviour;" to soften men's prejudices, and silence their clamours, and to win their attention to it, by making them feel its benign effects. He will not indeed attempt to compel any man to assent to his creed, or conform to his mode of worship; for this can only make hypocrites: but many things may be done by those in authority, to promote religion, consistent with the most complete toleration. They may very properly repress, by the power of the magistrate, various kinds of vice and impiety, and endeavour to exterminate the seminaries and haunts of profligacy and villainy, and the schools of blasphemy and profaneness: they may furnish the *endowed* seats of learning with teachers of sound principles and good morals; and countenance every reasonable plan for the good education of youth, and especially for instructing the children of the poor: they may protect from insults, and liberate from restraints, such ministers of the gospel "as labour in the word and doctrine;" and favour their being placed in extensively useful situations; they may select young persons, who give hopeful evidences of piety and ability, and assist them in obtaining that learning, from which their circumstances excluded them: they may render the admission into the ministry open to able, conscientious men, and close it against the vicious, the ignorant and the mercenary: they may shew a decided regard to upright, diligent, and pious ministers, who differ from them in some forms or sentiments; and a marked disapprobation of the negligent and profligate, who pretend to be of their judgment. Thus authority may be improved as a talent, in promoting the cause of truth and piety; in the religious instruction of the people at large; in preventing the effects of the indolence, carelessness, ignorance, and vice of those who ought to instruct them; and in countenancing such, as would do all in their power for this purpose. Books may also be dispersed, and multitudes taught to read; the attendance on divine worship may be encouraged, and every thing discountenanced that tends to keep men from it; prisons, workhouses, hospitals, the army, the navy, &c., may be supplied with diligent, able, and pious teachers; and various societies and plans may be formed and adopted, to promote this great end, by rulers and magistrates, who are zealous for the honour of Christ, and the interests of pure and undefiled religion: and yet every man may be allowed to worship God according to his conscience; and care also taken not to allure mercenary men to an unprincipled conformity. Thus the pious rulers of Judah, *according to the dispensation under which they lived*, restrained vice and idolatry, and supported the worship of Jehovah: from Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David, even to Nehemiah; and true religion uniformly flourished in proportion to their prudent and pious endeavours: nor would it be easy to assign a reason, why the same talent may not be improved to similar purposes by Christian rulers, *according to the genius of the new dispensation*: except it be thought, that because many have abused it by intolerance and tyranny, all the rest ought to bury it in the earth; a con-

Digitized by Google

clusion well suited to the lukewarm indifference, which in this age hath succeeded to fiery zeal and cruel bigotry, and assumed the dignified name of moderation! But all judicious Christians will, nevertheless, continue to beseech the Lord, to make all kings and rulers like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, that they may be "nursing fathers to the church;" and neither spare pains nor expense to disperse the knowledge of God's word by able, faithful men, through whole nations, (2 Chron. xvii. 7—10; xxix—xxxii; Neh. viii.) But let this suffice on a subject, coincident indeed with the plan, but, in some respects, perhaps out of the sphere of these Essays.

II. Natural abilities and acquired knowledge, constitute a talent of great importance; as they confer a distinguished reputation, and as they qualify a man to propagate with effect whatever principles he adopts. Nor is there any essential difference, *in this respect*, between the more solid and the more showy kinds of genius and accomplishment, for each gives a proportionable degree of influence in different circles. Philosophers, poets, orators, historians and other learned and ingenious men, possess a peculiar advantage for giving a good or bad bias to the sentiments and conduct of mankind; though much less ability will enable a man to do extensive mischief, than is requisite for enlarged usefulness; because our fallen nature powerfully inclines to that side. But, alas! it has been abundantly proved that far more abuse such distinguished talents, than make even a tolerable improvement of them; and the fatal success, with which the deformity of vice, and the unreasonableness of impiety and infidelity, have been varnished over, by vain reasonings, ingenious misrepresentations, and empty declamations, set off with all the charms of style and the authority of deep erudition; and in which the violations of God's law, the neglect of his worship, and the contempt of his gospel, have been disseminated by men of genius and learning, in books of all kinds and on all subjects, can never be sufficiently lamented. Nor has superior eminence in painting, sculpture, or other elegant arts; and the charms of engaging conversation; or the fascinating powers of music; or the talent for fine speaking, or that for theatric imitation of nature and real life, been less fatally abused. If then every one must give an account to God, for the use he makes of his natural and acquired endowments, and for the consequences of all his actions; such as have employed "talents angel-bright," during their whole lives, in doing the work of fallen angels, by poisoning the principles, and corrupting the morals of whole nations, and of successive ages, will one day receive a dreadful recompence for those works, which have given them the most flattering celebrity among their ill-judging fellow-mortals! But a man may employ such endowments in a comparatively inoffensive manner, and yet fall very short of improving his talents. He may so yield to indolence, diffidence, and love of retirement; or be so incapable of coming up to the standard of excellency, which he hath fixed for himself; that he may totally slip his opportunity of usefulness, waste the day of life in doing nothing to any purpose; live *plausibly* to himself; and instead of "occupying with his Lord's money," or even "giving it to the exchanger," he may "hide it in a napkin" and "bury it in the earth." We may not indeed conclude, that all, who are reprehensible in this way, are "wicked and slothful servants" in their whole character: yet our Lord's language on this subject, and the examples of those, who on a death-bed have mourned over the opportunities of usefulness which were then for ever gone, should teach every disciple to "be diligent while the day lasteth, and before the night cometh, in which no man can work."

But evangelical principle will influence the consistent believer, whilst he is careful not to over-rate his talents, seriously to inquire what advantages they give him for glorifying God and doing good: and to endeavour to avail himself of them, without yielding to inactivity, despondency, fear of difficulties, or regard to the praise of men. A person of this character, who is held in estimation for learning or genius, may be very useful, even by sanctioning with his decided approbation the faithful ministers of Christ; by recom-

Digitized by Google

mending useful publications; and by professing and pleading for the doctrines of genuine Christianity, answering objections to them, and stating them in a clear and Scriptural manner. His character will introduce him to numbers from whom his undistinguished brethren are excluded; and give him a sphere of activity, in which he may subserve the temporal interests of mankind: and his principles will influence him to improve these advantages with prudent zeal, to recommend the gospel to them. As books written by ministers of religion are read with an absurd prejudice (for who objects to a treatise on medicine, because it was written by an eminent practitioner of physic?) so the learned and ingenious may do good service, by a testimony from the press to the truths of religion, which will not have this prejudice to encounter: and the poor especially will be exceedingly pre-possessed in favour of such plain tracts, as men of this character condescend to write and disperse among them. Nor can superior talents be better employed, than in recommending those things "that angels desire to look down into," and in glorifying Christ and promoting the salvation of souls. Learned men would also do eminent service, if they would infuse into those approved publications on various subjects, by which they attract the attention of mankind, a savour of evangelical religion; as an antidote to the poison conveyed in the poems, histories, and scientific treatises, which are sent out by the enemies of revealed truth. In short, the consistent Christian will take care not to abuse his endowments in any way to do mischief to mankind, whatever lucre or credit it might give him; and he will endeavour, with persevering diligence, to do good in the world, by every means in his power: and if he have only a mediocrity of talent, he will occupy with it according to the duty of his station, as one who expects the coming of his Lord, and desires to be numbered with those faithful servants whom he will bid to enter into his joy.

III. The pastoral office is a subject of too great importance, to admit of any adequate discussion in this place. Yet, as a talent that demands improvement, it must not be wholly omitted. Such persons as have just been mentioned, may often be led to examine how far the due improvement of their talents may require them to enter into this sacred office: and though many considerations may induce them to decline it, yet the love of ease and lucre, or the fear of contempt, should not deter them. The sacred ministry, in every degree, is a good work: and he, who desires to be the Lord's steward in so important a concern, should carefully scrutinize his motives and intentions, and seek, with unremitting diligence and fervent prayer, every qualification for the due performance of it. Alas! what numbers utterly neglect these things, and rush into the ministry, from the lowest motives, and in the worst manner imaginable! Let us pity and pray for them, for, alas! in general "they know not what they do:" and perhaps they, who design them for this profession, and they, who concur in admitting them into it, have the greater guilt. But the apostle's message to Archippus may be considered as addressed to all who are actually entered; "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it," (Col. iv. 17.) Such are stewards of the mysteries of God; ambassadors for Christ to sinners; watchmen to give warning, as they will answer for it at their peril; shepherds to feed the flock of God, which he hath purchased with his blood; labourers in his vineyard, and builders in his holy temple. Surely, then, they who have received such a ministry, should renounce "the works of darkness, and the hidden things of dishonesty;" they "should take heed to themselves and to their doctrine; they "should labour and not faint," but endure hardship, and face danger as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; they should be instant in season and out of season; and, laying aside all worldly pleasures, diversions, and pursuits; all avarice, ambition, and mere secular studies which subserve not the end of their holy calling; they should devote their hours, health, abilities, and influence to the service of the sanctuary, "giving themselves wholly thereunto." Nothing, however lucrative, creditable, or congenial to their taste, should engross those powers and that

Digitized by Google

time which they have engaged to employ in seeking the salvation of souls: for the desire of spending their lives in this good work, in preference to more lucrative and easy situations, seems to be that very work of the Holy Ghost, by which men are indeed "moved to take this sacred office upon them." The consistent believer, therefore, whether his office in the church be more exalted or more obscure, will certainly endeavour to improve it as a talent, by all means in his power, and with steady perseverance. His example, domestic concerns, converse, doctrine, public ministry, private labours from house to house, attention to the instruction of children, influence over his brethren in the ministry, occasional services, employment of time spared from necessary duties, or money saved from current expenses, will all be adverted to, in subserviency to the end he has in view; he will delight in his work, study the Scriptural rules and examples for his conduct, and pray to be made an able minister. But they who are concerned in this subject may easily enlarge on these hints in their private meditation.

IV. Wealth is a talent entrusted by the great Proprietor of the world to some, for the good of many; but it is commonly so wasted in gratifying all the senses and appetites, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" or hoarded up in idolatrous avarice; that it is considered in Scripture as exceedingly dangerous to the souls of those who possess it (Matt. xix. 23—26; 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, 17—20.) Yet the wise man had reason to say, that "money answereth all things," (Eccles. x. 19;) as it may be made extensively useful to others, and thus eventually profitable to the faithful steward himself: and "the wisdom that is from above" will teach the consistent Christian to make this use of it. The wealthy are not required in Scripture to part with their estates; nor is it generally advisable to abolish *all distinction* between them and their inferiors in their style of life. Nay, such men as are engaged in lucrative business, provided it be lawful, and they are on their guard against its snares, will generally be more useful by carrying it on as the Lord's servants, and using its profits as his stewards, than by retiring from it in the prime of life, to a situation which perhaps hath not fewer snares, but inferior advantages for doing good. The consistent believer, however, will be influenced by his principles to retrench a variety of superfluous expenses, and exceedingly to moderate his desires of providing for his family, that he may raise a fund for charitable and pious uses: and whilst he shews a readiness for every good work, by which the wants and miseries of men may be relieved; he will especially endeavour to render all his liberality subservient to the more important interests of religion. This may be attempted by disseminating divine truth in the world, as the only seed of genuine piety and holiness, dispersing useful books, assisting in the religious education of children, in training up pious young men for the ministry, or, in various ways promoting the faithful preaching of the gospel. Wealth gives a man influence also: and the affluent Christian may use this influence to important purposes: and when the leisure it affords is accompanied by a suitable turn of mind, he may do more good by an edifying example, pious converse, and prudent efforts, in his own sphere (from which others are often excluded,) than by retiring from it, even though he expend in charity what is saved by that measure. His conduct may also be rendered very useful among his tenants, domestics, and neighbours; and if he frequently disperse his charity with his own hands, accompanied by pious exhortations, &c., it will have a vast effect in conciliating mens' minds to his religious principles. But, indeed, the reflections already made, suffice to shew in general how this talent may be improved; and particulars on so copious a subject, in this compendious Essay, can scarcely be expected—only it may be added, that far more should be thus employed than commonly is. They, also, who are in more narrow circumstances, have a talent to improve in this respect; much might be saved from superfluous expenses by most Christians, to employ in those good works which are "through Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God." Nay, such as labour, working with their

Digitized by Google

hands, are expected to give something to those that are in want. This specimen may illustrate what is meant by "the improvement of talents." Many others might be mentioned: but brevity must be consulted. Time is an universal talent, which every Christian should redeem from useless ways of *killing* it, that he may employ it in some beneficial manner; for idleness is intolerable in a disciple of him, who "went about doing good." Every man has influence in his own circle, however contracted, and he may improve it to good purposes. For did we duly consider our obligation to God our Saviour, the great end for which our lives are continued, and the near approach of death; a desire would be excited in our hearts to live to his glory, and to serve our generation; and this would influence us to improve all our advantages to this purpose. And were every professor of the gospel "thus steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," the blessed effects that would follow may in a measure be conceived, but cannot be fully estimated.

ESSAY XXIII.

On Prayer.

As "every good and every perfect gift cometh from above," so nothing can be done aright, in any of those things that accompany salvation, except as we seek communications from God by the prayer of faith. It must, therefore, be considered as essential to the design of this compendious publication, to treat expressly on a subject of such great use and importance. The worship, which the Lord requires of us, may be distinguished into adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication. Contemplating the glories of his nature, as displayed in his works, and revealed in his word, we express our reverential awe of his greatness and majesty, and our admiring love of his infinite excellency, by adoring praises, and by celebrating the honour and harmony of all his attributes: recollecting our personal obligations unto him as our Creator, providential Benefactor, and Saviour, we express our grateful sense of them in thanksgiving, general and particular: whilst the desire of happiness, and love of our fellow-creatures, joined to a conviction of our weakness and poverty, and a confidence in the Lord's goodness and mercy, dictate prayers for ourselves and others: and in all these respects we render to the Lord the glory due to his name. In speaking, therefore, more particularly concerning prayer, it is not meant to exclude or overlook the other parts of divine worship, but rather to consider them as connected with it, and as bearing a proportion in experience to the enlargement of our hearts, "in making our requests known unto God." Yet, as prayer is especially the employment of poor and helpless sinners on earth, and the introduction, as it were, to those praises and thanksgivings which are here anticipations of the work and worship of heaven, so it may be proper, in this place, to confine our inquires principally to this part of divine worship.

Prayer, in its very nature, is the expression of dependence, indigence, desire, and expectation. Petitions can scarcely be offered with propriety to those on whom a man has no kind of dependence; the rich will rather buy than beg; but he that has no money, and is unable to earn any, is likely to be induced by necessity to the humiliating expedient of supplicating relief; yet he can heartily ask for nothing of which he is not in want, or which he feels no desire to obtain; and at last, whatever his dependence, indigence, or desires may be, he will not be disposed to petition any one, whom he considers as totally unable or unwilling to relieve him. Prayer, therefore, in the most general sense, implies a belief, and contains an acknowledgment

Digitized by Google

of the being and perfections of God, of his presence with us, and of our dependence on him for "life and breath and all things:" it includes a consciousness, that we are insufficient for our own happiness; that we cannot defend ourselves from dangers and calamities, nor secure our lives, health, limbs, senses, mental powers, possessions, relatives, &c.; that we cannot obtain the sure supply of all our wants, nor find comfort in life or death; and that all our fellow-creatures are unable to do these things for us. It further supposes, that we earnestly desire the things for which we pray; and believe, that the Lord is able, and hope that he is willing, to grant the request which we present unto him: "He that cometh unto God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him," (Heb. xi. 6.) It is, therefore, evident, that all, who deny the particular providential government of God, and so ascribe every thing to second causes, independently producing their effects, by chance or necessity, as to exclude the immediate operation of the Great First Cause, cannot with any propriety of language be said to pray. Whatever sense they may have of their indigence, and whatever may be their hopes and desires, they cannot feel a dependence, or fix their expectations on God; and every expression, which seems like prayer, is either used by such men as a mere expletive without meaning, or it must be a virtual renunciation, *in that instance*, of their avowed principles. But we are not so much concerned to inquire about the prayer that might be offered by rational creatures, who, however faultless, are *in themselves* indigent and dependent, as about that of fallen and ruined sinners, for such we all are. This part of worship, indeed, may be considered as a duty required by the divine law: for the command "of loving God with all our hearts," &c., certainly requires all men to seek to him to make them happy in his favour and presence; and sinners (if allowed to hope for such a blessing) must surely be bound to desire and ask for this forfeited felicity; for how could any reasonable being be supposed to love God supremely, who did not desire, and would not request, restoration to his favour, renewal to his image, the enjoyment of his love, and the capacity of glorifying him?

Nevertheless, prayer is here considered especially as a means of grace, to which we are directed and encouraged by the gospel. It is therefore, in this sense, an expression of our entire dependence on the unmerited mercy of God, as justly condemned transgressors, for pardon, acceptance, and all things pertaining to eternal salvation. It springs from "poverty of spirit," or a humble consciousness that we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," (Rev. iii. 17, 18); that we have neither wisdom, righteousness, holiness, strength, or any disposition and ability for those things to which we are exhorted by the word of God; and that none of our fellow-creatures can give us any effectual help in this our deplorable condition. It implies sincere and vigorous desires, yea, hungerings and thirstings after God and spiritual blessings, (which cannot be bribed, diverted, or assuaged by worldly things), arising from a deep conviction of mind, that the declarations of Scripture concerning a future state, the resurrection of the dead, judgment, heaven and hell, are great realities, compared with which all else is a vanishing dream and an empty shadow: and it imports also, that we have a prevailing persuasion and hope, that notwithstanding our sinfulness and helpless misery, the Lord is ready to bestow eternal blessings on all who apply for them in the way of his appointment. These dispositions, or preparations of heart for prayer, (Psalm x. 17), admit of various degrees, but without some measure of them no man is capable of praying aright. They who are wise in their own eyes, cannot be disposed to ask wisdom of God; the Publican's prayer cannot be the language of the proud Pharisee's heart; nor can the sensual, avaricious, or ambitious, *sincerely* request the mortification of their favourite passions, or the renewal of their souls to the Divine image, unless some contrary influence hath begun to change their judgment and dispositions. Hence arises that difficulty which men generally experi-

Digitized by Google

ence about prayer, and the need they have of forms and helps, even in their most secret retirement; for, *in this case*, such forms are often a vain effort to teach a man to pray for those blessings which are diametrically opposite to the prevailing dispositions and inclinations of his heart. The starving wretch, whose urgent wants have overcome his reluctancy to beg, needs only encouragement, and words flow spontaneously from his genuine desires of relief; but the rich man who should choose to act the beggar, must learn his part, and how to perform it, by rule, study, and practice. The fears, hopes, and desires of the condemned criminal inspire him with an energetic, though perhaps rude eloquence, when allowed to supplicate the clemency of his prince; and even the little child finds apt words to ask his parent for food, and to complain of cold or pain. Why then cannot men find language, when they would beseech the Lord to give them the blessings promised in his word? Because the state of their hearts is so contrary to those blessings, that they feel no want or desire of them. Did experience prove, that the Lord uniformly conferred health, long life, wealth, success, honour, &c., on all that prayed for them, men would generally get over their reluctancy to this humiliating service, (notwithstanding their natural independence of spirit), and find no difficulty in framing pertinent, earnest, and importunate petitions for things so suited to their carnal minds. Yet they find themselves not only reluctant, but strangely at a loss, when they would pray for spiritual gifts: wherefore? because they are not congenial to the desires of their hearts. When our Lord on earth "went about doing good," they who felt their miseries, and earnestly desired relief, expecting it from his power and love, applied to him with suitable and energetic petitions: but others were more ready to say with the unclean spirit, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus;" or to "entreat him," with the Gadarenes, "to depart out of their coasts," than to cry after him, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Pride, therefore, a carnal mind, alienation from God, contempt of spiritual blessings, and unbelief, are the sole reasons why men neglect prayer, or are unable to pray aright, except by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

But when we consider how great, glorious, and holy the Lord is, and how guilty and vile we are; the question seems not so much to be, whether the sinner ought to pray; as whether he may come with his supplications into the presence of his offended Sovereign? The humble and self-abased will not doubt but that the permission given to a rebellious worm, to present a petition for pardon and salvation to the glorious God, is an act of grace: and indeed it is always looked upon as such, when a prince receives a petition from a rebel under a deserved sentence of condemnation. But the Scripture places this matter in a much stronger light: for the whole *legal* constitution concerning the sanctuary, the veil, the priesthood, and high-priesthood, the sacrifices, burning of incense, &c., and especially the great day of atonement, (on which alone even the high-priest might enter within the veil to the mercy-seat, with the blood of the sin-offerings, and the smoke of the fragrant incense;) were most evidently designed to show what intervening obstacles must be removed, before the God of infinite justice and holiness could, consistently with his glory, permit sinners to approach him, even on a throne of grace, to present their humble supplications for pardon and reconciliation. And, though under the New Testament we are invited "to come boldly to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy," &c.; yet we have no access, except by "the new and living way, which Jesus hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say his flesh," given as a sacrifice for sin, (Heb. iv. 16; x. 19—22); and by his high-priesthood, which is the substance of all those ancient shadows. Whilst therefore we speak of the encouragements given to the vilest of sinners, even from the first moment that they desire mercy, to present their prayers before the throne of grace; and whilst we determine, that prayer is a part of the worship required of us by the Divine law, and therefore an universal duty, we should never forget, that it is

Digitized by Google

a most surprising instance of the Lord's condescension and compassion, and one of the most valuable privileges, that we are allowed to make our requests known unto him, with well-grounded hopes of acceptance; for those actions may be *our* indispensable duty, which through our guilt and pollution it may yet be totally improper for the Lord to accept at our hands, (Isaiah i. 11—15).

In order to encourage the prayers of sinners, the Lord displays his glory on a throne of grace; here he "waits to be gracious," and to dispense pardons and every blessing to all who ask for them, by faith in Jesus Christ. Had he been revealed merely as seated on a throne of glory, sustaining the character of a righteous Lawgiver, and an impartial Judge, a kind friend to the obedient, but a terrible avenger of the rebellious: it might well have been said, "Jehovah reigneth, let the people tremble;" but as he hath made himself known on a mercy-seat, as "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself;" so it may be said, "the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." The whole plan of the gospel, as it relates to the person, righteousness, atonement, and mediation of Emmanuel, is evidently intended to give encouragement to the trembling sinner, to seek mercy from the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The general invitations of the gospel supersede the necessity of inquiring, who MAY come in this new and living way? "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him come." The feast of divine love is provided, "all things are ready;" and the messengers of salvation are not only commanded to invite all they meet with, but even "to compel them to come in," by every argument, persuasion, expostulation, and encouragement they can devise, for these are the means by which the Holy Spirit produces the willing mind, and gives the praying heart. The very appointment of this way of applying is a complete encouragement to all who feel desires after the blessings of the gospel, and are willing to become humble supplicants for them: as it implies that the Lord purposes to bestow them as free gifts on indigent beggars, and not on those who would buy, earn, or deserve them: for prayer is the very language of poverty and distress, which guilt alone hath brought on any part of the rational creation of God. Every general command or exhortation therefore to pray, is an encouragement to all who desire to pray; and whatever guilt they have contracted, or in whatever depths of temptation and misery they are plunged, it says to them, "Be of good comfort, arise, he calleth thee." Such general exhortations abound in Scripture; they are often addressed to the vilest transgressors, and are commonly connected with absolute promises; "for every one that asketh receiveth," &c. (Isa. lv. 7, 8; Jer. xxix. 11—13; xxxiii. 3; Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, 37; Zech. xii. 10; Matt. vii. 7—11; John iv. 10; Acts viii. 22). These promises do not indeed engage that God will hear the prayers of the formal, the hypocritical, or the impenitent, who may (like the unclean spirit) pray very sincerely, "torment me not," and yet hate true religion as much as ever. Such prayers of the wicked are "an abomination to the Lord:" but when the vilest transgressor is so far humbled and softened, as to pray from his heart for mercy and grace, and all the blessings of salvation as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ;" he begins "to offer the prayer of the upright, in which the Lord delighteth," (Prov. xv. 8, 9). These assurances are confirmed by the examples of Scripture: when Manasseh, vile as he had been, began to humble himself, and pray to the Lord, he was not upbraided with his abominable crimes, but mercifully accepted, pardoned, and delivered, (2 Chron. xxxiii). When it could be said of persecuting Saul, "behold, he prayeth!" no further doubt remained of his acceptance and reconciliation. The Publican, who loathed himself as much as the Pharisee disdained him, and who, not daring to come near, or "to lift up his eyes unto heaven, smote upon his breast, and said, God be merciful to me, a sinner," went down to his house justified, rather than he who deemed it presumption in such a wretch to pray. Even the short petition of the almost expiring thief, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest

Digitized by Google

in thy kingdom," received an immediate answer, full of astonishing grace. Nor is there one instance upon record, of a single prayer being rejected, except for the hypocrisy, wickedness, and unbelief, with which it was presented. To all these encouragements we may add the frequent commendations bestowed on importunity, frequency, and fervency in prayer, (Luke xviii. 1—13); and the testimony of all the servants of God to his readiness to hear and save them, from the most tremendous depths, into which their sins had cast them, whenever they were brought to cry unto him, and say, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul."

If then the vilest sinner, from the first moment when he desires to pray, is warranted to come, with humble hope of being heard and answered; the same considerations should much more enlarge the expectations, and confirm the confidence of those who "continue" (or *persist*) "in prayer" from day to day; pleading, with persevering importunity, all the promises, in the Redeemer's name, and earnestly seeking for that wisdom, strength, grace, and consolation, which may enable them to live to the glory of God, as well as for the pardon and salvation of their souls. "We have not, because we ask not;" we are straitened in ourselves, not in the Lord; and did we more enlarge and multiply our requests, with greater fervency and importunity, we should be enabled to exchange many of our complaints for joyful praises. This our experience in a great degree evinces, if we be indeed experimentally acquainted with the life of faith and prayer: for who can deny that his inward supports and comforts, his strength to resist temptation and to endure labour and suffering, have borne some proportion to his frequency and fervency in prayer?

Indeed, the word of God contains the most energetic language on this subject; declaring, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much:" and the only righteous men on earth are penitent, believing sinners, (Matt. xviii. 19; Mark xi. 24; John xiv. 13, 14; xv. 7, 16; xvi. 24; Eph. iii. 20; James i. 5—7; v. 15—18; 1 John iii. 22; v. 14, 15). Many curious questions have been started on this subject; for "vain man would be wise:" but "the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness;" and such difficulties will presently vanish from the serious, humble mind: yet Christ himself reminds us, that "our Father knoweth what things we have need of, before we ask him," (Matt. vi. 5—8): and it is obvious, that our prayers cannot be requisite for the information of Omniscience, or to *dispose* the God of all grace to supply our wants. But prayer, when seriously engaged in, tends directly to increase our acquaintance with ourselves, and our own character and situation; to lead our attention to the promises of God; to abstract the mind from all selfish and carnal confidences; and thus to bring us into that humble, dependent, and waiting frame of spirit, which is the preparation for duly receiving and using every Divine blessing. To pray in a suitable manner is in effect to say, "Lord, we are poor, vile, helpless, wretched creatures; we have no other refuge to flee to, we know not what to do; but our eyes are unto thee, because we believe that thou art ever ready to forgive and save all that call upon thee." As therefore the parent requires the child to ask those things that he intends to give, that the child may feel his dependence and obligation, and be brought to a proper disposition towards the parent; so the Lord requires us "to make our requests known to him," that we may be prepared to receive his intended benefits with thankfulness, to notice his hand in them, and to give him the glory of them. And when our prayers accord to his precepts, are grounded on his promises, imply submission to his providence, and spring from a supreme desire of spiritual blessings: when we pray for those things that are truly good for us, conducive to the advantage of our brethren, or in any way honourable to his name, we cannot expect too much in answer to them; for "he is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think." The Scripture abounds with examples of the efficacy of prayer: Abraham ceased to ask, even in behalf of Sodom, before the Lord refused to answer him; and

Digitized by Google

"God remembered Abraham, in preserving Lot from the overthrow," (Gen. xviii. 17—33; xix. 29). Jacob wrestled with God, and prevailed with him; and Esau's heart was softened and his rage disarmed: he set out an enemy, yet met him as a brother, (Gen. xxxii; xxxiii). When Moses prayed, Amalek was discomfited: and when he pleaded for Israel, the Lord said, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them." The time would fail to speak of David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, &c. Doubtless the conversion of Saul was an answer to the prayer of dying Stephen: and we may suppose, that the believers at Damascus were heard in their cries for protection from that cruel persecutor, in a manner beyond their most enlarged expectations; as were those at Jerusalem, when they prayed for Peter's deliverance from Herod, (Acts xii.) But indeed, except in the case of miraculous interpositions, the same is still experienced; and the more any man has made the trial, the fuller will be his assent to this truth. The Christian, who has been frequent, fervent, and particular in his supplications, for a length of time, has doubtless found, that many of his petitions (defective and defiled as he knows them to be) have been manifestly answered, both in his own temporal and spiritual concerns, and in behalf of others; often beyond his expectations, and contrary to apparent probability: some requests have been granted, not exactly in his meaning, but in a far more desirable way: he hath prayed for the removal of the "thorn in the flesh:" but the Lord hath answered him by showing the sufficiency of his grace, and employing the trial "to humble, and prove him, and to do him good at the latter end," (2 Cor. xii. 1—10:) so that the things that seemed the most against him, have most effectually promoted his highest interest. Or he has found his prayers answered, by feeling his mind wonderfully reconciled to a denial, from a conviction that "he knew not what he asked;" or by a calm serenity in waiting the Lord's time for those things, which he had impatiently desired. The causes of his perturbation and anxiety remain, after his prayers have been presented before God; but the solicitude itself has given place to a divine "peace which passeth all understanding;" for "he called on the Lord, and was strengthened with strength in his soul." In short, he can scarcely produce an instance, in which he "poured out his heart," with earnestness and importunity, that he failed of obtaining the blessing he sought, or was not, after a time, satisfied with the denial. In many cases his intercessions for those around him have been graciously answered; in others he may still retain hope; and in all he may be assured, that they will return into his own bosom. So that the efficacy of prayer, to bring light and wisdom into the mind, peace into the conscience, submission into the will, and purity into the affections; to keep our garments clean, our armour bright, and our hearts joyful: to make us strong for the conflict, for service, or for suffering; to obtain sufficiency for our place and work, and a blessing on our endeavours; to secure peace with our enemies, or protection against them; to carry every point that is truly good for us; to bring down blessings on our families, friends, and country; to procure peace and prosperity to the church, the conversion of sinners, and the spread of the gospel; and for all things, which we can desire or conceive; must be allowed by every man, who reverences the Scriptures, or knows what it is "to walk with God." Did men speculate and dispute less, and pray more, their souls would be like a watered garden; fruitful, joyful, beautiful, and fragrant. Prayer is the first breath of divine life: it is the pulse of the believing soul, the best criterion of health or sickness, vigour or debility. By prayer we draw water with joy from the wells of salvation: by prayer faith puts forth its energy, in apprehending the promised blessings, and receiving from the Redeemer's fulness; in leaning on his Almighty arm, and making his name our strong tower, and in overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil. All other means of grace are made effectual by prayer: every doctrine and instruction produces its effect, in proportion as this is attended to: every grace revives or languishes according to the same rule. Our grand conflict with

Digitized by Google

Satan and our own hearts is about prayer: the sinner feels less reluctance, and meets less resistance, in respect of all other means, than in retiring to pour out his heart before God in secret; and the believer will find his chief difficulty to consist in continuing instant and fervent in this spiritual exercise. If he succeed in this, all else will eventually give place before him, and turn out to his benefit and comfort.

It should be remembered, that prayer may be either public, social, or secret. Public worship most honours God, and is the grand end of our assembling together: though few seem to understand it so. Social worship tends greatly to maintain brotherly love, and to bring down blessings on families and societies. But secret prayer is the grand means of maintaining communion with God, and keeping alive the power of religion in the soul. Without this, the others will degenerate into formality; and the man himself will be devoid of life, strength, and comfort in the midst of them. Christians should, therefore, remember to prepare for public and social worship by secret prayer, meditation, and reading the Scriptures; and not yield to the temptation of neglecting the one by spending much time in the other. If we desire to pray aright, we must well observe, that the Scripture always calls upon us "to pray in the Spirit," or "in the Holy Ghost," or rather "by the Spirit;" our first petition, therefore, should be, that the Lord would graciously give us his Holy Spirit to teach and enable us to pray: when this is duly attended to, a very heartless beginning will often have a bright and encouraging conclusion, and our desires may be too large even for utterance; but without it, words will often flow, that have little meaning and no correspondent affections, (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) We should also be *particular* in our secret devotions; both in confession, supplication for temporal and spiritual mercies according to our circumstances, thanksgivings, and prayers for others; for whilst men deal in *general* words, they must either be very short and superficial, or run into needless repetition: and occasional ejaculatory petitions are a blessed addition to stated seasons of retirement. All our prayers should be *explicitly* offered in the name, and through the intercession of the Divine Saviour; in dependence on his merits; with realizing expectation of success; and in a loving, forgiving spirit.

Finally, a thorough acquaintance with the prayers contained in the psalms, and other parts of Scripture; and a careful observation of the requests, which the sacred penmen offered, the pleas they used, the order and proportion they observed, and the confessions, adorations, and grateful praises, they intermixed with their fervent supplications for personal and public, temporal and spiritual mercies, will be more useful to the serious Christian, in this part of religion, than all other helps whatsoever. Above all, the Lord's prayer, well understood and digested, will teach him what the confidence and leading desire of his heart in every prayer should be: what are the blessings especially to be sought for; and with what moderation and submission he should ask for temporal mercies, compared with the forgiveness of his sins, and deliverance from temptation and the tempter, from evil and the evil one: that in approaching the throne of grace, he may "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, assured that all other things will be added to him."

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXIV.

On Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

AMONG the ordinances which the Lord hath appointed in his church, as means of grace and acts of solemn worship, some have from the earliest times been distinguished by the name of *sacraments*. This word originally signified the military oath, which the Roman generals required from their soldiers; and these institutions were considered as solemn engagements, to be faithful and obedient to Christ, under whose banner all Christians have enlisted. But in process of time sacraments were multiplied, which gave rise to immense superstition and absurdity: and as human nature continually verges to extremes, so it may be queried, whether numbers have not lately been induced too much to disregard all distinctions of this kind. The word *sacrament*, however, is not Scriptural; and the nature of the two ordinances, which Protestants consider as alone entitled to this name under the Christian dispensation, seems in general to be this: "In them Divine truths are exhibited to our senses, and illustrated to our minds, by outward emblems, and the reception of spiritual blessings is represented by significant actions. Thus observances, in themselves indifferent, by divine appointment become a part of religious worship, honourable to God and profitable to us; and positive duties arise, where none before subsisted by moral obligation."

Baptism * is the initiatory ordinance of Christianity, as circumcision was under the old dispensation, from Abraham to the ascension of Christ; and it consists in the application of water to the baptized person, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Water is the universal purifier of our persons, garments, houses, streets, and cities; it is essential to the beauty and fertility of the earth; and is the original element from which every liquor, that quenches our thirst or exhilarates our spirits, is derived. Water is, therefore, the most expressive Scripture emblem of the pure and satisfying blessings conveyed to us by the gospel; especially of the purifying, enlivening, fructifying, and consolatory influences of the Holy Ghost:, and many ceremonies of the law, as well as the introductory baptism of John, exhibited these benefits by the use of it. The whole of that happy change, which the apostle describes, may be denoted by the baptismal water; "but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," (1 Cor. vi. 9—11;) according to the Lord's promises by his prophet, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and all your idols will I cleanse you," &c., (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27; Ps. li. 2, 7; Zech. xiii. 1; John xix. 34; 1 John v. 6.) But it more immediately represents the purifying of the judgment and affections from the pollution of sin, by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. The beginning of this work, therefore, is described with reference to the outward emblem, as being "born of water and of the Spirit;" it is called "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," which God our Saviour pours upon us abundantly: and it is especially, though not exclusively, meant by "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," (John i. 31—33; iii. 3—8; Tit. iii. 5, 6.) The appointment of this emblem, in the initiatory ordinance of Christianity, emphatically testifies the doctrine

* The design of this compendious publication renders it wholly improper to treat of this subject in a controversial manner. Upon mature deliberation the writer is a Pædo-baptist; and his discussions will consequently be most applicable to those, who coincide with him in sentiment and practice. But he considers all as brethren who "love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;" and would not willingly offend any man, who conscientiously differs from him in such matters; he hopes, therefore, for similar candour from such readers. The disputes about the mode and subjects of baptism seem to have too long occupied a disproportionate degree of attention; whilst numbers remain ignorant of the nature and obligations of the ordinance itself. Mr Henry's observation seems well grounded; "that if infant baptism were more conscientiously improved, it would be less disputed."

Digitized by Google

of original sin, and the necessity of regeneration: for it declares every man, as "born of the flesh," to be so polluted, that, unless he be washed with purifying water, he cannot be received even into the outward church of God; and unless he be inwardly cleansed by the Holy Spirit, he cannot be a member of the true church. In this it coincides with circumcision, which implied, that without the mortification of the corrupt nature derived by generation from fallen Adam, and the removal of that obstacle to the love and service of God, no man could be admitted into covenant with him, (Deut. xxx. 6; Jer. iv. 4; Rom. ii. 28, 29.) And like that ordinance, it is "the seal of the righteousness of faith;" for he, and he alone, who possesses the inward and spiritual grace, which both circumcision and baptism outwardly denoted, has a Divine attestation to the sincerity of his faith, and to the reality of his justification in the righteousness of the Redeemer. The form of baptism, "in," or *into*, "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," contains an unanswerable argument for the doctrine of the Trinity, and constitutes a perpetual profession of it: it implies also, that the baptized person is the avowed worshipper and servant of God "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," who is become the salvation and portion of his people.

When the apostles went forth "to teach," or disciple, "all nations," to baptize them in this name, and then to teach more fully all things that Christ had commanded, that they might observe them, (Matt. xxviii, 19, 20,) the converts, whether made from among the Jews or Gentiles, were baptized on an intelligent profession of repentance and faith. When the Jews made proselytes to their religion, they circumcised the adult males on such a profession, according to the nature of their dispensation: and Pædo-baptists in similar circumstances would adopt the same conduct. But we suppose (for reasons that have been repeatedly assigned,) that as the Jews also circumcised all the males in the families of the proselytes, who were incapable of personally rejecting the Jewish religion; so the apostles baptized the households of their converts, including the females, and only excluding such, as, being able to answer for themselves, gave evidence, by word or deed, that they did not obey the truth: nay, that those children were thus admitted as a part of the visible church, and relatively holy, who had one believing parent, though the other continued an unbeliever, (Acts xvi. 3; Rom. xi. 16, 17; 1 Cor. vii. 14.) The adult convert, by receiving baptism, acknowledged, according to the obvious meaning of the ordinance, that he was a sinner by nature and practice; that he repented of his sins, and believed in Christ for the forgiveness of them; that he renounced idolatry, and all other objects or forms of worship, "to serve the living and true God," in whose name he was baptized, according to the revelation of the gospel; that he cordially believed the truths contained in that revelation, and relied on the mercy of the Father, on the mediation of the incarnate Son, and on the grace of the Holy Spirit, for complete salvation; and that he sincerely purposed to forsake all his sins, and every confidence, pursuit, interest, or indulgence, which interfered with these engagements. Thus he openly joined himself to the Lord, according to the new covenant in Christ Jesus; and embracing its benefits as his portion and salvation, he solemnly vowed to renounce the world, deny himself, bear his cross, endure persecution and hardship, and fight against sin and Satan, as a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ, to the end of his days: and doubtless prayers, instructions, professions, and engagements to this effect, accompanied the administration of baptism, as circumstances required or admitted of them. Such a solemn transaction would tend exceedingly to confirm the faith, to excite the love, to strengthen the mind, and to encourage the hope of the true convert; and though a hypocritical profession could answer none of these purposes, yet we cannot determine, that confused views, partial convictions, and general purposes of following Christ, might not frequently issue in true conversion, even by means of this ordinance, and the prayers, instructions, and admonitions,

Digitized by Google

which preceded, attended, and followed it: for it does not become us to limit the operations of the Holy Spirit. The public administration of baptism would also honour God and the Christian religion; establish and edify believers, by reminding them of their privileges and vows; make way for subsequent exhortations, admonitions, or censures, in respect of the baptized person, as occasion required; and excite the attention of numbers to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

The baptism of the infant offspring of such converts was likewise a solemn declaration, that they desired the same blessings for their children, as they had chosen for their own portion; and they thus pledged themselves to the church, "to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" giving them every instruction, and using all means of rendering them wise unto salvation. When they brought the children, which were afterwards born to them, to be baptized, they virtually renewed their former profession and engagements, and declared their presevering purpose of instructing and commanding their households in the fear of God; and as the children grew up, such of them as profited by these means would personally accept of the privileges, and enter into the engagements peculiar to Christianity, in the manner that will shortly be touched upon.

As the number of professed Christians increased, the baptism of infants would proportionably grow more common; and when the progress of the gospel among Jews and Gentiles was less rapid, the baptism of adults would not occur so frequently. But when the progress of error and superstition made way for the nominal conversion, and the baptism of whole nations, the latter would be seldom heard of, in countries previously professing Christianity. This indiscriminate administration of infant baptism, however, has produced many very bad effects; and the abuses, misapprehensions, and criminal conduct, which too manifestly connect with it, have given many pious persons a rooted aversion to that way of administering the ordinance, and have furnished them with plausible objections against it. But when a serious parent is persuaded (notwithstanding all these crimes and abuses,) that the baptism of the infant offspring of believers accords to the word of God, and in compliance with what he judges his duty, presents his children to be baptized, he solemnly ratifies and renews the profession and engagements of his own baptism; he avows his earnest desire, that the covenant made with him may be for the good of his seed also, (Jer. xxxii. 38—40; Acts ii. 38, 39;) and he engages to bring them up in the faith and obedience of the gospel, as far as his instructions, discourse, example, and prayers can have any influence. As they grow up, he, or other serious relations, may profitably explain to them the nature, meaning, and engagements of baptism; the blessings it signifies; the advantages of being thus early admitted into the visible church, and trained up as her children; and the aggravated guilt of deliberately rejecting the salvation and service of God, from pride of heart and carnal affections; or even of neglecting the means of appropriating these advantages, and complying with those engagements which their parents or senior friends had entered into in their name, and for their benefit. Thus an additional avenue is opened to the consciences of young persons, and an additional restraint imposed on their passions. Ministers also may employ these topics, with great advantage, in addressing both the parents and the children, and even such as wish to have their offspring baptised; and if this were done frequently and generally, both in public and private; if baptism were administered solemnly before the congregation, and proper reference were made to it in the sermon; and if some discouraging barriers to these things were removed, the most diffusive good might be expected. But even as matters now stand, the administration of infant baptism has great influence in giving vast multitudes some ideas of the gospel, especially of original sin, regeneration, and the Trinity; and whilst all who act profanely, deceitfully, or formally in this matter, must answer for their own crimes; if good be done, either to parents, children, or others,

Digitized by Google

and if the name of God be in any measure glorified, the end of the institution is so far answered, even though no special benefit should be thought to accrue to the baptised person. The pious parent may, therefore, rest satisfied with performing what he considers his duty: if the child live, the transaction may be useful, by way of subsequent improvement: nay, we may allow, that the Holy Spirit may in some cases regenerate the infant, in answer to the prayers of believing friends, even at the time of baptism, without confounding the outward sign with the thing signified; or supposing the sacrament to produce the effect by its own inherent energy. Many other things connected with this subject must be waved, for the sake of brevity; but these hints may perhaps assist some plain Christians to understand the nature of baptism, and their duties and obligations respecting it. The outward sign doubtless will not profit those who live and die without "the inward and spiritual grace," even "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness;" and the conduct of multitudes, who act in direct opposition to the most solemn engagements, entered into for themselves or others, will render their doom more dreadful at the last day, than that of Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, or avowed infidels.

The Lord's Supper also calls for our peculiar attention, as it is of the greatest importance in the system of Christianity. When baptized persons give hopeful evidence, that they are partakers of "the inward and spiritual grace" of the initiatory ordinance, they should be exhorted to make or renew a *personal* profession of their faith in Christ, their cordial acceptance of his salvation, and their purpose of living according to his commandments, by joining with his people in receiving the Lord's Supper: for this seems to be the Scriptural way of making such a profession, whatever expedience there may be in other introductory observances. Nothing can be more simple in its own nature than this institution, though superstition has been peculiarly successful in misrepresenting, obscuring, and perverting it. Our blessed Saviour, the evening before his crucifixion, having celebrated the passover with his disciples, appointed the Lord's Supper to be a memorial of his redemption, as the paschal lamb had been a prefiguration of it. He, therefore, took bread, and by prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, set it apart to be the representation of his body: he "brake it," to shew that his body must be wounded, bruised, put to great torture, and undergo death, for the redemption of his people; and he directed each of his disciples to eat of that bread in remembrance of him, to instruct them in the way by which his atonement would be made effectual to their salvation. In like manner, he took the cup, and, renewing his prayers and thanksgivings, he bade them all drink of it, as the wine represented his blood, which was about to be shed to purchase the blessings of the new covenant, and to ratify it in behalf of the whole multitude of believers, for the remission of their sins. The language of Christ in appointing this ordinance is manifestly *figurative*, and cannot be *literally* interpreted (unless we should explain the *material cup itself* to be *the blood of Christ*, or rather *the new covenant*:) and this renders it the more wonderful, that any set of men should be so adventurous and absurd as to require all the church to believe, in contradiction to their senses, that the bread in the sacrament, after consecration, becomes the real, entire body of Christ! But, indeed, the Scripture gives us no intimation of any peculiar mystery in this institution, though strong metaphors are employed, the more emphatically to demand our attention to the importance of the thing signified by the outward emblems. (Matt. xxvi. 26—28; Mark xiv. 22—24; Luke xxii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. xi. 23—25.) From these Scriptures I apprehend we may learn in general, that our Lord commanded all his disciples, in every age to the end of the world, frequently to meet together in his name, and with solemn worship, suitable to the occasion, to break, distribute, and eat bread, the most salutary and universal of all viands, and to pour out and drink wine, the most valuable and refreshing of all cordials. This action was intended to be a perpetual memorial of Christ, especially of his body

Digitized by Google

broken, and his blood shed for their sins. "The body" (for that alone could be represented by an outward emblem,) doubtless was put for his perfect and entire human nature, as personally united to the eternal Word and Son of God. His blood (the shedding of which was the evident and immediate cause of his death) denoted the whole of his expiatory sufferings, which terminated when he expired on the cross. The dignity, righteousness, and holiness of the Redeemer; the depth of his voluntary humiliation, and the intenseness of his agonies; the vastness of his condemnation and compassionate love; the deplorable state of deserved misery from which he redeemed sinners; the extensive efficacy of his one oblation; the honour and happiness to which he exalts all true believers; and the discovery made in this great transaction, of the justice and love of God, the excellency of his law, the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, and the importance of eternal things, should all be taken into the account, when we contemplate the death of Christ, through the medium of these outward emblems. Whilst the action of eating the bread and drinking the wine illustrates the manner in which the sacrifice of Christ becomes effectual, "even by feeding on him in our hearts, by faith with thanksgiving," (John vi. 53—58.) The Lord's Supper was instituted in the evening, and probably the disciples received it *sitting;* but as no command was given in these respects, they may well be considered as matters of indifference, in which the validity of the ordinance is not at all concerned.

The very act of receiving the Lord's Supper implies a confession of our guilt and ruined condition, from which we could not have been saved, if Jesus had not died upon the cross to redeem us; a profession that we entirely believe the testimony of God respecting the person, undertaking, and atonement of Christ, and the reality, sufficiency, and efficacy of his vicarious sufferings; an avowed dependence on the mercy and grace of God, according to the promises and provision of the new covenant, which was ratified by Emmanuel's blood; an acknowledgment of our obligations to this most gracious Benefactor, and an expression of our love and gratitude to him; a sacramental engagement to obey him as our Lord and Saviour, surrendering ourselves to him, as "bought with a price, to glorify him with our bodies and spirits, which are his:" and a public uniting of ourselves to his redeemed people, to walk with them in Christian love and fellowship, in all the ordinances of divine worship, and in all holy conversation and godliness.

It is, therefore, most evident that no man is prepared for this sacred ordinance, or capable of sincerely and intelligently making that profession which is implied in it, unless he be, indeed, a self-condemned penitent, who really believes the gospel, and renounces all other confidences to "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him:" and unless, in his most secret retirement, he endeavours to receive Christ Jesus the Lord, as his Prophet, Priest, Ruler, and Saviour, purposing henceforth to walk in obedience to him. The man who habitually allows himself in known sin, or the neglect of known duty; who harbours pride, envy, malice, avarice, or sensual lusts in his heart; who comes to the sacrament to compensate for his sins, or to cloak his secret transgressions; who attends on it to quiet conscience by a self-righteous service, substituting the outward sign for the thing signified; or who uses it as a *mere* step to secular preferment, must "be guilty of the body and blood of Christ," and eat and drink his own condemnation. But the humble, trembling penitent, who would apply for salvation through the crucified Saviour, by using the means that he hath appointed, ought not to suspect any snare, or fear any danger in approaching the Lord's table, even though many doubts many still disquiet his mind, or great remaining darkness obscure his views.

When the Corinthians had most grievously profaned this ordinance, and exposed themselves to severe rebukes and corrections, the apostle did not counsel them to seek for security by absenting themselves from it; and, though they might doubtless profitably use the advice and assistance of their

Digitized by Google

pastors or brethren, he did not direct them to be satisfied with their decisions, but "to examine *themselves*, and so eat of that bread," &c. (1 Cor. xi. 27—31.) It was incumbent on them to examine diligently, whether they were in the faith? Whether they did truly repent and believe the gospel? Whether their professions were sincere, and their motives pure? Whether their hearts and lives were consistent with the holy religion they had embraced? Whether they did cordially accept of the whole salvation of Christ, and yield themselves to his service? And whether they came to the Lord's table, "discerning his body," "remembering his love," and seeking communion with him and his saints? Such self-examination must always become professed Christians; not to find out some excuse for neglecting to obey the dying command of their loving Saviour, but in order to remember him with more fervent affection, and more exalted thanksgivings. It is very useful, when we have the opportunity, to set apart some time, previous to the administration of the Lord's Supper, thus to re-examine ourselves, to inquire into our progress in vital godliness, and to renew our secret cordial consent to the new covenant in the blood of Christ. Such a preparation is especially important to the new convert, when (with the instructions and prayers of ministers and pious friends) he first approaches to make this profession; and to the backslider, when he is recovered from his wanderings, and desires to renew the solemn transaction. In all cases, such self-examination should be considered merely as introductory to the exercise of repentance and faith, the practice of works meet for repentance, and fervent prayers for divine teaching and grace to enable us more profitably to attend on the ordinances of God; for should any one discover, that at present he could not approach the Lord's table in a suitable manner, he ought by no means to rest satisfied with absenting himself, but should rather be more earnest in using every means of becoming an acceptable communicant. The believer, however, who habitually examines himself, and daily exercises repentance and faith, may very properly receive the Lord's Supper, without any further preparation, when an unexpected opportunity presents itself.

It is evident, both from Scripture, and the earliest records of the primitive church, that this ordinance was administered to the professed disciples of Christ in general, every Lord's day at least. This frequent recollection of that great event, which is the central point of our holy religion, was exceedingly suited to increase humility, hatred and dread of sin, watchfulness, contempt of the world, faith, hope, love, gratitude, patience, compassion, meekness, fortitude, and all other holy dispositions. These are obvious and intelligible advantages of frequent communicating, if it be done in a serious, considerate, and reverential manner: for the Lord's Supper as directly tends to strengthen and refresh the believing soul, as the bread and wine do to nourish and invigorate the body. At the same time, due honour is rendered to the Lord by this repeated profession of our faith and love; the sympathy of pious persons uniting in so affecting an ordinance promotes edification; the great truths of Christianity are thus brought before the minds of increasing numbers; and the presence and blessing of the Lord may confidently be expected, whilst we thus meet in his name, and present our prayers and thanksgivings before him. Indeed, this institution was expressly intended "to shew forth the Lord's death till he come;" and this proves, that the doctrine of the atonement is the most essential part of Christianity; and an habitual dependence on a crucified Saviour, the grand peculiarity of the Christian character. The abuses that have taken place in respect of this ordinance, have at length produced a lamentable neglect of it; to the dishonour of the Redeemer, and the increase of that lukewarmness, of which it is a manifest indication. No doubt the pharisaical, hypocritical, avaricious, and profane approaches of numbers to the Lord's table, constitute a most heinous sin, which, *unless repented of*, will vastly increase their final condemnation. But they, who through ignorance, impiety, carelessness, malice, or secret crimes, are unfit for this holy ordinance, are equally un-

Digitized by Google

prepared for death and judgment: and when they withdraw, as Christians are about to commemorate their dying Redeemer, they should consider that they allow themselves to have no part or lot in the matter. Nay, indeed, they are as incapable of praying acceptably as of communicating worthily, whilst they live in wilful opposition to the commands, and neglect of the salvation of Christ. Some persons withdraw, apparently, lest they should make too avowed a profession of religion, or bind themselves too closely to a holy life! As if this instance of disobedience would excuse their conformity to the world, and contempt of the favour and authority of their Judge! Others are harassed with groundless scruples, lest a well-meant but unsuitable approach to the Lord's table should exclude them from future pardon; when even the scandalous profanation of the Corinthians was only visited by temporal corrections, "that they might not be condemned with the world." Or they fear, lest some subsequent fall should be irremediable; when Peter denied Christ, the very night in which he had both celebrated the Passover and the Lord's Supper, and yet was graciously restored! This remaining unbelief induces many to hesitate, and often to refuse obedience to this plain command, during their whole lives: whilst others seem afraid of communicating too frequently; or make the languor of their affections a reason for absenting themselves, by which it is exceedingly increased. But let the new convert, who would thrive in his profession, speedily begin to consider this institution, and deliberately prepare for attending on it, as soon as he can do it sincerely: and let the believer gladly embrace every opportunity of communicating; avoid whatever may unfit him for it; and daily remember the vows of God that are upon him, to live to him, who died for his salvation.

ESSAY XXV.

On the State of Separate Spirits, the Resurrection of the Body, Judgment, and Eternity.

THE grand design of revealed religion is, to draw off our attention and affections from things present and temporal, and to fix them on things future and eternal. But yet, such is the constitution of the universe, and such the plan of the gospel, that the regulation of our pursuits and actions, in subordination to the interests of the unseen state, tends to produce by far the greatest measure of happiness to individuals, and to society, which can possibly be attained in this present life. Whatever conjectures or discoveries the more rational of the heathens had made in this interesting concern; or whatever intimations God had given about it to the ancient church; it may with the strictest propriety be said, that "life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel." For the new Testament revelation, elucidating and confirming that of the Old, has removed all doubt and uncertainty about this future state of existence, except what arises from our want of faith, or acquaintance with the holy Scriptures: it hath given every needful instruction on the important subject; and hath annexed to it that authority which is suited to render it influential upon our whole conduct. This information is of the greatest moment to us; for all error, obscurity, or uncertainty in this respect, must proportionably enfeeble and unsettle the mind; and deduct from the efficacy of those motives, which excite or animate the soul to vigorous exertion, self-denying obedience, patient sufferings, or courageously meeting dangers, in adhering to the truth and will of God amidst the opposition of this evil world: this concluding Essay, therefore, will contain some thoughts on the intermediate state, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the process, rule, and event of judgment.

Digitized by Google

The immortality of the soul is established by the uniform testimony of Scripture; which fully declares, not only that it is created capable of endless existence, but also that it is the unalterable purpose of the Creator, it should exist to eternity. This can never be proved by any abstract or metaphysical arguments; as the *intention* of God can only be known by express revelation. The language of holy writ constantly implies, that the soul is capable of exerting its powers and faculties, in a state of separation from the body; the apostle could not tell, "whether," during his vision, "he were in the body, or out of the body," (2 Cor. xii. 1—3;) and he spoke of "being absent from the body and present with the Lord," (2 Cor. v. 8.) We frequently read of "the things done *in the body*;" which implies, that the same agent is capable of doing things *out of the body*. It is called "the earthly house of our tabernacle, which must be dissolved, that we may have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Then the body "shall return to the dust, and the spirit to God," (Eccles. xii. 7.) Accordingly we read of "the spirits of just men made perfect," as well as of "an innumerable company of angels," (Heb. xii. 22, 23.) So that these hints may suffice to shew, that the system of modern materialists cannot be supported (any more than the other doctrines of the same school,) except by rejecting the word of God, and treating the sacred writers as men who espoused and propagated vulgar errors, whilst they professed to "speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Scriptures, moreover, teach us, that both the righteous and the wicked, immediately on leaving the body, enter upon their state of happiness or misery. Lazarus was carried, as soon as he died, into Abraham's bosom; and when "the rich man's body was buried, in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments;" whilst his brethren, in his father's house, were following him to the same state of misery. Should it be urged, that this is a parabolical representation; we answer, that he, who is truth itself, would never have spoken these things, even in a parable, which have a direct tendency to mislead the reader, and to raise an expectation of a state which has no existence. But, indeed, our Lord was pleased to confirm this inference by his address from the cross to the dying thief, "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," (Luke xvi. 22—31; xxiii. 43;) which could not be unless his soul existed in a state of happiness, whilst his body lay buried with that of the other malefactor. They, therefore, who deny this distinction between soul and body, must suppose our Lord, as well as his apostles, to have been mistaken. His answer to the Sadducees, who cavilled about the doctrine of the resurrection, is equally decisive against those who deny the intermediate state: for "if God be not the God of the dead, but of the living," how can he be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have been wholly dead during so many revolving centuries? (Matt. xxii. 29—32.) The apostle "desired to depart and to be with Christ, as far better" than living on earth: but he would not have been any sooner with Christ for departing hence, if he were to lie entirely under the power of death until the resurrection; nor could he "be present with the Lord, when absent from the body," if he were never made capable of beholding him till his second coming. The souls of those, to whom Christ, by his Spirit in Noah, preached during the term of God's long-suffering while the ark was preparing, are represented as being *in prison* at the time when Peter wrote, (1 Pet. iii. 19, 20:) and John was directed to write, "blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord, *from henceforth*," &c. (Rev. xiv. 13:) yea, he saw an innumerable company before the throne, who were crying for vengeance on their persecutors; but were required to wait till the rest of their brethren had finished their testimony; which, however it may be interpreted, must precede the resurrection of the dead, (Rev. vi. 9—11.) And here it may be proper to repeat the observation, that the God of truth and love would not arrange the circumstances of a vision in such a manner, as directly tended in the most obvious interpretation to mislead men in so material a point. These are a specimen of those Scriptural argu-

Digitized by Google

ments, by which we are induced to expect an immediate entrance into happiness or misery, as soon as we leave this world, by an anticipation of that sentence, which will be publicly pronounced at the day of judgment.

Various absurd notions and curious speculations have been formed about this intermediate state; which the use of the word, translated *hell*, for the place of separate spirits, may have in part occasioned. Thus Christ by the prophet expressed his confidence in the Father, "that he would not leave his soul in *hell*, neither suffer his Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm xvi. 10; Acts ii. 27—31.) Some persons, indeed, would explain both these expressions to denote the grave, by a very unnatural tautology: but scarce any thing can be more evident, than that by *hell* is meant the place of separate spirits, to which the human soul of Christ repaired, as soon as his body was laid in the grave; till their re-union at his glorious resurrection. The Scripture seems in general only to inform us, that the souls of the righteous, when their earthly tabernacle is taken down, are made perfect in knowledge, purity, and love; being freed from all remains of sin, removed from every temptation, made conquerors over all their enemies, exempted from all labours, sorrows, fears, and distresses, and admitted into the presence of Christ, to behold his glory and enjoy his love; that they are qualified to join the rapturous worship of angels, and to share their felicity, in the full completion of all their spiritual desires, in communion with God, and in the society of holy beings; that their joys far exceed all that they could on earth conceive or imagine, and are fully adequate to their most enlarged capacities, though proportioned to the degree of their grace and fruitfulness on earth; that nothing is wanting to the absolute completion of their happiness, but that re-union with their bodies, for which they wait in joyful hope, assured, that then "mortality shall be swallowed up of life;" and that, with adoring acclamations, they witness the Redeemer's triumphs on earth, and the accomplishment of those prophecies, for which they fervently prayed, whilst here they fought the good fight of faith. On the other hand, it is manifest from the sacred oracles, that the souls of the wicked, when they leave the body, "are driven away in their wickedness," under condemnation and the wrath of God, and under the power of their vile affections, now freed from all restraint: and that thus they immediately sink into a state of despair and punishment proportioned to their crimes, in which they will continue till the day of judgment, in dire expectation of that event to complete their misery, by reuniting them to their bodies, as the instruments of their crimes, and sharers with their souls in the righteous vengeance of their offended Creator.

After the souls of successive generations have been thus gathered to their own company, and their bodies have returned to the ground whence they were taken, the end will at length arrive; when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 7—10.) The Divine Saviour will then personally appear in the clouds, even as the apostles beheld him when he ascended into heaven (Acts i. 11.) This his second advent shall be ushered in "by the voice of an archangel, and the trump of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17;) and shall immediately be followed by the resurrection of "the dead in Christ," and the change of all such believers as shall then be found alive upon the earth (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52:) afterwards by the resurrection of all others, who shall have died from the creation of the world to this grand consummation of all things: and then the earth and all its works shall be burnt up by one general conflagration. No words, however, can possibly explain, illustrate, or enable the reader to frame an adequate conception of this majestic, tremendous, yet most delightful scene; or of the different emotions of the righteous and the wicked

Digitized by Google

during this astonishing catastrophe. What a spectacle of grandeur and horror would the conflagration of one large city present, were it all at once in flames! What then will be the prospect exhibited to the innumerable spectators, when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up," (2 Pet. iii. 10—13). When universal nature shall, as it were, expire in convulsions! when the haughtiest rebels shall call in vain for rocks and "mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of their offended Judge!" and when all possibility of escape or mercy shall vanish for ever!

The resurrection of the dead is more especially connected with this second advent of Christ: "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation," (John v. 28, 29). *The multitudes* that sleep "in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," (Dan. xii. 2): and "there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust." For, as the body is a part of our nature, and the instrument of the soul in doing good or evil; so it is meet that it should be raised from the dead, to share the happiness or misery which shall be awarded to every one, according to his works, by the righteous Judge of the world. Little, however, is spoken in Scripture concerning the resurrection of the wicked, compared with the copious information there afforded concerning that of the righteous. By the omnipotent word of him, "who is the resurrection and the life," the bodies of his redeemed people shall first be raised from the dust of the earth, from the depths of the sea, and from every place in which they have been deposited; and being restored to life, incorruptible, immortal, and glorious, they will be reunited to their immortal spirits, to participate and increase their unspeakable felicity. For, "the Lord Jesus shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like to his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself," (Phil. iii. 20, 21). We know what appellation the apostle bestowed on those, who, cavilling at his doctrine, inquired, "how are the dead raised, and with what bodies do they come?" (1 Cor. xv. 35). Questions about identity, and difficulties started about the possibility of a resurrection, may answer the purposes of a proud sceptical philosophy; but the humble disciple, sitting as a little child at the Saviour's feet, will allow, "that such knowledge is too high for him, he cannot attain unto it:" and perceive that it is meet to answer all such objections by saying, "hath God spoken, and shall he not do it?" "Can any thing be too hard for the Lord?" We are sure, that our bodies will be so far raised the same, that we shall know ourselves to be the same persons, who did such and such things on earth: but "as we must all be changed, our bodies will not be in all respects the same. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body;" the image of the first, and of the second "Adam:" and as we have borne the image of the "earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly:" "that which is sown in corruption, dishonour, and weakness, shall be raised in incorruption, glory, and power." "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" but he will give every one his own body, even as he gives to every seed an increase of the same kind that was sown, (1 Cor. xv). When we reflect on the resplendent appearance of Christ on the mount of transfiguration; and further recollect, that the beloved disciple, who leaned on his breast at table, fell at his feet as dead, when he appeared to him in glory; we shall find our views enlarged, and expect to receive a body at the resurrection beyond expression glorious and beautiful, and as much superior to these bodies of our humiliation, as the heavens are above the earth. They will be liable to none of the wants, decays, disorders, or grossness of our present animal frame; no longer will they retard our motions, or impede us in contemplation and devotion: but they will be suited to assist and increase the most sublime and

Digitized by Google

rapturous joys of our immortal souls to all eternity. And, however it may appear to us at present, we shall doubtless find the resurrection of our bodies to be an immense accession to our happiness, and to our capacity of enjoying and glorifying God.

Whilst the Scripture states the order of the resurrection, and intimates that the final justification of believers shall precede the resurrection of the wicked, that they may be assessors with Christ in judging men and angels, (1 Cor. vi. 2, 3), it also speaks more fully on the grounds of their admission to their glorious inheritance, in language which implies, that the whole assembled world shall be made acquainted with them. Nothing can be more august than the description given of this tremendous day of God. The apostle, in vision, "saw a great white throne, and him that sat thereon, from whose face the heaven and the earth fled away, and there was no place left for them," (Rev. xx. 11—15). No words can more emphatically declare the sovereign authority and infinite power, justice, and holiness of the Judge. "He saw the dead also, both small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened," &c. This declares the discoveries that will be made, when omniscience shall "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of all hearts," (1 Cor. iv. 1—3); the perfect recollection, and full conviction, which every one will then have of all his thoughts, words, actions, motives, intentions, &c., however they had previously been mistaken or forgotten; the judgment to be made of the whole by the perfect rule of the divine command; and the final condemnation of all, "whose names were not found written in the book of life," implies, that none can abide the severity of this judgment, except those who are interested in the new covenant mediated by the Son of God. Whilst we are taught, by "death and hell being cast into the lake of fire," that all the saints will be finally delivered from death, suffering, and every consequence of sin, which will from that period be wholly destroyed, or confined to those who perish in their sins. St Paul declares, that "we must all appear," or be made manifest in our true character, "before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad," (2 Cor. v. 10). The same interesting truth is exhibited under various parables or similitudes: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire:" "the tares shall be separated from the wheat;" "the corn from the chaff:" and "the man without the wedding garment from the welcome guests," "at the end of the world; when the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth," (Matt. xiii. 41—43, 49, 50). Indeed all the descriptions which are given us of this grand event, apply especially to the case of those who have the benefit of revelation: but we are expressly told, that "when the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats," (Matt. xxv. 31—46). This he will do with perfect ease, certainty, and impartiality: he will pronounce the final sentence with absolute authority, from which there can be no appeal; execute it with a power to which all resistance will be vain; and display the propriety of it so clearly, as to silence every objection. These things are suited to give us the most exalted apprehensions of the Judge himself, who "shall come in his own glory," as Mediator, "and in the glory of the Father, exercising all Divine perfections through the medium of the human nature; so that this will be "the *appearing of the glory* of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," (Tit. ii. 13). Then "every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him," (Rev. i. 7; Jude 14, 15).

When "the books shall be opened," it will appear, that many of those who had been guilty of numerous and heinous crimes, for a great part of

Digitized by Google

their lives, had at length truly repented, and believed in Christ with a living faith: being "then justified by faith, they had peace with God:" "their sins were cast into the depths of the sea, never more to be mentioned against them," (Ezek. xviii. 22; Micah vii. 19). Their repentance having been evidenced by newness of life, their faith having worked by love to Christ, his cause, and his people, and the Spirit of adoption having sealed them by his sanctifying influences; a new character was formed in them, and their subsequent good works evince their union with Christ, show their title to the eternal inheritance, and constitute the measure by which their gracious recompense is ascertained. For, as all their former sins have been blotted out, and all the defects, defilements, and failures of their subsequent obedience were repented of, and washed away through the daily exercise of faith in Christ; so nothing will be found written concerning them, but the account of the good works, which they did from evangelical principles, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit; whether they have been spared to produce these good fruits for a longer or a shorter time. Then all their conscientious self-denial, their secret piety and charity, their heavenly meditations and affections, their pure disinterested motives, their edifying converse, their zeal, gratitude, self-abasement, godly sorrow, patience, meekness, perseverance in doing good against evil, constancy in the midst of opposition; with all they have renounced, ventured, laboured, or suffered for Christ's sake, will be brought to light and made manifest before men and angels. Every calumny and malicious charge of hypocrisy, affectation, &c., will be refuted; their whole conduct shall appear in its true light, and it will be undeniably manifest, that they were the upright worshippers and servants of God, the disciples and friends of Christ, and decidedly on his part in this evil world: then it will be seen, that it "is a righteous thing with God to recompense with his heavenly rest," those who willingly endured tribulation for his sake, whilst they lived among his enemies, (2 Thess. i. 4—12). And no one shall be able to object to the decision of the Judge, when he shall say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

On the other hand, many who call Christ, Lord, Lord, will be exposed as hypocrites, and workers of iniquity, (Matt. vii. 23, 23; xxv. 1—11; Luke xiii. 25—28): for it will then be proved, that their profession or preaching of the gospel, attendance on ordinances, and outward services, sprang from corrupt and selfish motives; that their transient convictions and affections never issued in an inward change; that they secretly "loved the wages of unrighteousness," or the pleasures of sin; that they were the slaves of avarice, ambition, sensuality, or malignant passions; that they did all their works to be seen of men, and were strangers to constant, fervent, secret religion; and, in short, that they did not love Christ and his cause, were deceived by a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and a false repentance, were not interested in the new covenant, and therefore remained under the curse of the law, with the aggravation of having also abused and disgraced the gospel. This will not only be the case with those who have secretly committed gross immoralities, and cloaked them with a religious profession; but of all who have not shown their love to Christ, by a disposition to love and do good to his people for his sake: and whatever they may now urge in excuse for their conduct, they will be silenced at last; and with all other unbelievers be doomed "to depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The several Scriptural representations of this decisive event concur in establishing these conclusions: "they who sin without law shall perish without law;" they that transgress the law (having had the benefit of revelation), will be judged and condemned according to it: but, if they claim the benefit of the gospel, their professed faith in Christ will be tried by its fruits and effects; so that none will eventually stand in judgment, except the true believer, who hath shewn his faith by his works. Yet the doom of benighted

Digitized by Google

heathens, however vile their conduct hath been, will be far less dreadful than that of wicked Christians: so that hypocritical professors of the gospel will not only be more severely punished than the inhabitants of Tyre and Zidon, but it will even be more tolerable for Sodom than for them.

Let it be here observed, that very dangerous conclusions have been drawn from our Lord's words, respecting the day of judgment (Matt. xxv.): as if any humane and beneficent actions would ensure a man's acceptance at that solemn season: but every reflecting person must perceive, that nothing will then be favourably noticed, which has been done by impenitent despisers of the gospel from ostentation, or pharisaical pride, or a mere instinctive propensity; for this supposition contradicts and disannuls the whole system of Christianity. In fact, kindness to believers, as the brethren of Christ, from love to his name, truth, cause, and image, as the genuine effect of living faith, is alone mentioned in this description. No doubt, however, but love to our fellow-sinners and enemies, from evangelical motives, will be graciously accepted; but active, liberal love to true Christians, whom we are *naturally* disposed to scorn and hate, is selected, as the most unequivocal proof of our love to Christ; nor can this ever be separated from other instances of humble obedience, in the habitual tenor of our conduct. It may easily be conceived what discoveries will be made, "when the books shall be opened," in respect of the different descriptions of unbelievers; which will suffice to "stop every mouth, and bring in the whole world as guilty before God;" and to illustrate the Divine justice in the condemnation of all those, who shall then "go away into everlasting punishment." Every one, who seriously reflects on his own conduct, during the whole of his past life; and compares his thoughts, words, and works with the holy commandments of God, will gradually more and more find his own heart to condemn him: and if this be the case with the most moral of the human race, where will the blasphemous, the profligate, the fraudulent, the oppressor, and the murderer appear? Whatever may now be objected, or excused, the discovery of the Divine glory, of the holy and perfect law, of man's obligations, and of the whole behaviour of every individual towards God and man, will then leave the most specious unbelievers speechless, and make them feel the justice of their own condemnation. But what words can express the consequence of this definitive sentence? Or who does not see that the language of Scripture is selected to mark out the most tremendous effects of almighty indignation? "These shall go away into everlasting," (or eternal) "punishment;" but how can this be, if the persons thus condemned do not exist for ever in a state of punishment? Or what proof have we of the eternity of happiness intended for the righteous, if the same word in the same verse in one place do not mean eternal? We need not enlarge—if the ideas "of a never-dying worm," "an unextinguishable fire," "the blackness of darkness for ever," and "the company of the devil and his angels," do not warn men to "flee from the wrath to come," none else can; for these only fail, because they are not believed. On the other hand, "a kingdom that cannot be moved," "an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance," "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory," "pleasures at God's right hand for evermore," are expressions so energetic, that did we truly believe and attend to them, we could not but be influenced by them in all our conduct. Here, then, we pause—"beloved, we know not what we shall be; but this we know, that when Jesus shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is;" and the countless ages of eternity will but serve to enhance our unutterable joys. With what words, then, can we more properly close this Essay, and the present compendious publication, than those of the apostle? "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that we look for such things, let us be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

THE sacred Scriptures speak of "dead works," and of a "dead faith;" of a "form of godliness," and a "form of knowledge:" and in whatever way these may be combined together, the whole, as well as each of its constituent parts, must be widely different from "living faith," the "power of godliness," and a "new creation to good works." So that there is often far more coincidence in this respect, between men of discordant sentiments on speculative points, than is generally supposed.

To shew the absolute necessity of evangelical principles in order to holy practice; and their never-failing efficacy in sanctifying the heart, when cordially received; and to exhibit, according to the best of the Author's ability, the nature and effects of genuine Christianity, as distinguished from every species of false religion, without going far out of his way to combat any of them; is the special design of this publication. But he has, at the same time, endeavoured to explain, establish, and enforce his views of the gospel in that manner, which was deemed most likely to inform the mind and affect the heart of the attentive and teachable reader.

The doctrinal part of the apostolical epistles is always stamped practically; and the holy tendency of every divine truth is clearly shewn: on the other hand, the practical exhortations are constantly enforced by evangelical motives and encouragements. This may therefore be considered as a good test of sterling divinity, by which it may be known from all that is counterfeit, or greatly debased with alloy.

The texts selected for these sermons are generally very plain and comprehensive; and the evident meaning of them, as they stand in the Scriptures, has been carefully investigated and adhered to: so that the reader, who hesitates concerning the doctrine, or the conclusions deduced from it, may, by diligently examining the context, perceive how far these are warranted by the authority of the sacred writers.

The Author, since he first circulated his proposals, has been determined, by the advice and reasons of his friends, to omit the short prayers, which he in-

Digitized by Google

tended to add at the end of each sermon; but he hopes, that, as in other respects he has exceeded the proposals, he shall escape censure in this particular; and be credited in saying, that he had no motive in the alteration, but to avoid every obstacle to the usefulness of the publication.

To the special blessing and providential disposal of the only wise God our Saviour, he would commend this feeble endeavour to glorify him and promote the cause of the gospel: and whatever reception it may meet with from the public in general; he shall deem himself abundantly recompensed, if any persons should, by means of it, be brought to the saving knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, into whose name all Christians are baptized.

May 12, 1796.

Digitized by Google

SERMONS

ON

SELECT SUBJECTS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE TRUTH AND IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPTURE REVELATION.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 47.

It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.

THE honoured servant of God, whose words are here selected, was favoured with health and the unabated force of all its faculties, at a very advanced time of life: and, so far from claiming a privilege of relaxation from labour, he seems, as death approached, to have redoubled his diligence, in order that the Israelites might have the things which he had taught them, in perpetual remembrance. An hoary head is indeed a crown of glory, when thus found in the way of righteousness: and "blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

Among other methods of durably impressing the minds of the people, Moses was directed to compose a prophetic song; as poems are generally learned with greater eagerness, and remembered more easily than other compositions: and at the close of this sacred song he thus addressed the people, "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, even all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it." Having given this earnest admonition, he was directed to ascend mount Nebo, that he might die there: a circumstance which could not fail to add peculiar energy to his concluding exhortations.

The nation of Israel had spiritual blessings proposed to them by types and shadows, and Canaan represented the everlasting felicity of heaven, the inheritance of true believers. We live under a different dispensation, and enjoy peculiar advantages. "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."—"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip:—for how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Heb. i. 1—3. ii. 1—3. The words of the text are therefore at least as ap-

Digitized by Google

plicable to us, as they were to Israel of old; and we may from them take occasion—

I. To consider the *subject*, which is declared to be no vain thing.
II. To illustrate the import of that declaration.
III. To conclude the whole by a practical improvement.

I. Let us consider the subject, which is declared to be no vain thing.

No doubt Moses spake this concerning religion: but numbers would agree to the sentiment as thus stated, who would object to it when more particularly explained. For it is evident that the prophet was not speaking of *natural religion*, or that religion which man in his present condition can discover or attain, by the exercise of his natural powers without any assistance from revelation. Alas! the history of the human race proves, that this is indeed a *vain thing*, and utterly insufficient to direct us into the knowledge of God, or to make us partakers of happiness in his presence and favour. But that religion, which Moses had taught Israel, was given by immediate revelation from God, and was exclusively intended. The same is delivered to us at present, more fully and plainly, in the sacred Scriptures; and we may perhaps obtain the clearest conceptions of it, by considering them as a message from God to us; sent by prophets, apostles, and evangelists; or rather by his well-beloved Son. As far therefore as ministers adhere to the oracles of God, they also deliver the same message; and all, who disbelieve or despise them, disbelieve and despise him that sent him.

This message from God declares to us his own mysterious nature, by which he is distinguished from all the objects of idolatrous worship; it discovers to us his glorious attributes; his infinite power, knowledge, wisdom, and greatness; his eternal, omnipresent, unchangeable, and incomprehensible majesty; but above all, his consummate justice, holiness, truth, goodness, and mercy, as harmoniously exercised in his dealings with his rational creatures, and comprising the full perfection of all that is adorable and excellent.

The message teaches us our relations and obligations to this glorious God, as our Creator, from whom we derive our being and all our capacities; "in whom we live and move and are," and "who giveth us all things richly to enjoy;" and as our Governor and Judge, to whom we are in all respects accountable. It further assures us, that our souls are immortal; that our bodies will rise again from the dead; that after death is the judgment; and that a state of eternal retributions will succeed to the present transitory scene. And after all the conjectures, and boasted demonstrations of philosophers, even these fundamental doctrines must rest entirely on the sure testimony of God: for could it be proved with certainty that the soul is naturally immortal, who could know, whether the Creator might not see good to annihilate it, now it is become contaminated with sin? So that in every sense, "life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel."

The same message from God makes known to us his holy law, in its extensive, spiritual, and reasonable requirements, and awful sanction; with the rules of his providential government. It instructs us in the malignant nature, and fatal consequences of sin; and gives us a general intimation of the manner in which this destructive evil entered into the world; though it does not satisfy our curiosity by fully explaining that mysterious subject, the difficulties of which are not peculiar to any religious system. But it far more copiously and clearly instructs us in the way, by which we may be saved from sin and misery, which is unspeakably more conducive to our advantage.

The Scriptures are indeed more especially a message from God to us, concerning the person and salvation of Christ. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John v. 11, 12. This is the centre of revelation, in which all the lines meet from

Digitized by Google

every part of its ample circumference. The everlasting mercy of God in purposing the salvation of sinful men; his infinite wisdom, forming the grand design of glorifying his justice and holiness, even in pardoning and blessing those who deserved the most tremendous punishment; his unfathomable love, in giving his only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world; the great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh,"—Emmanuel purchasing the church with his own blood; the love of Christ in his obedience unto the death of the cross for us; his glorious resurrection, ascension, and mediatorial exaltation;—these constitute the central and most essential part of the message of God to us. "This," says he, by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."

Revelation also announces to us our real situation in this world, as criminals condemned to die: "Dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return." This sentence will certainly and shortly be executed upon every one of us; but we are also liable to a more awful condemnation in another world, from which deliverance may now be obtained. We are therefore respited from day to day: or rather we are put to death by a lingering execution; as every pain, disease, or natural decay is an anticipation of the separating stroke. But we are placed under a dispensation of mercy, and it is the grand concern of our fleeting days to seek the forgiveness of our sins, and the salvation of our souls, before the opportunity be for ever gone. The message therefore warns all men to flee from the wrath to come, commands them to repent and believe in Christ, and exhorts them without delay to forsake and break loose from every object, which keeps them from "fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them" in the gospel.

The sacred Scriptures give us likewise most important information concerning the Holy Spirit, as the author of divine life, and the giver of wisdom, strength, holiness, and consolation; as engaged to give efficacy to the word of salvation by his regenerating influences; and as promised to all those who pray for the inestimable benefit. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Luke xi. 13.

The same divine message prescribes also the means, by which we may apply for these blessings, and render our benefactor the tribute of thankful adoration. It directs us to diligent and persevering investigation of the Scriptures, and to continual earnestness in prayer; it reveals to us our God upon a throne of grace, to which we are invited to approach through a merciful and faithful High Priest: suggests pleas to be used in our supplications; and sets before us exceedingly great and precious promises, to direct our desires and animate our hopes; and it appoints other ordinances, in which we may wait on the Lord, and renew our strength, that we may run with patience the race set before us. We are also informed in the same manner, that there is an innumerable company of holy angels, who worship before the throne of God, and are nevertheless "all sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation:" and on the other hand, that there are fallen angels, numerous, powerful, subtle, malicious, and indefatigable, who watch every opportunity of doing us mischief, and especially of deceiving, defiling, and ruining our souls; from whose devices we can have no security but in the protection and guidance of him, who "was manifested to destroy the works of the devil."

Finally, the message of God shews us the peculiar character, motives, and conflicts of those who are truly religious; and distinguishes them from all other persons: and it gives directions, instructions, examples, cautions, and encouragement sufficient to render us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work. This view of the subject is indeed too compendious to give us an adequate idea of it; but it must suffice for our present purpose. We proceed therefore—

II. To illustrate the import of the declaration, "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life."

Digitized by Google

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God *in vain*;" that is, to confirm a false or doubtful assertion, or in a trifling concern. This may throw light upon the subject before us. The message contained in the Scriptures does not relate to things false or doubtful. There are indeed religious impostors, deluded enthusiasts, and priestly usurpations; but all religion is not enthusiasm or priestcraft: general declamations to this effect only prove that men are *unable* or *unwilling* to distinguish betwixt the genuine and the counterfeit: which evinces, that either their understandings or their hearts are very defective.—The apostle Peter, just before his martyrdom, endeavouring that the disciples might be able, after his decease, to have the things he had taught them always in remembrance, added,—"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye witnesses of his majesty; for he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him on the holy mount." But aware that the belief of this event depended entirely on his testimony, with that of James and John, he subjoined,—"We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts," 2 Pet. i. 16—19.

It may indeed be argued very forcibly, that the *public* miracles, recorded in Scripture, could never have obtained credit among contemporaries, had they not been actually performed; and that no future generation of Israelites or Christians could possibly have been persuaded, that their forefathers had always believed them, had the report been afterwards invented and propagated. Would it, for instance, by any method be practicable, to bring the inhabitants of this nation to believe, that an hundred years ago the Prince of Orange, when he obtained the throne of these kingdoms, marched an army through the German ocean, and that this had always been known and credited?

The argument therefore from miracles openly performed, or publicly attested before those possessed of power, and engaged by interest, reputation, and inclination to disprove them, is very conclusive: and perhaps no past event was ever so fully authenticated, as the resurrection of Christ, on which the whole fabric of revelation in some respects depends. Yet *to us* the word of prophecy may be said to be still more sure: for a system of predictions of remote events, which no finite mind could possibly foresee, is interwoven with every part of the Scriptures, and reaches from the first promise of the Seed of the woman, to the close of the sacred canon. These have been exactly fulfilling through successive ages, in respect of the Jews and the surrounding nations; the coming of the Messiah, and every circumstance of that grand event; with the subsequent concerns of the church and of the world to this present day. This forms such a demonstration that the Bible is indeed the word of God, that the more carefully it is examined, with a serious and impartial mind, the fuller conviction it must produce. It is indeed a kind of unobtrusive permanent miracle, which escapes the notice of the careless, but gives entire satisfaction to the diligent inquirer; and to this, all who have doubts on the subject, will do well to take heed, "as to a light shining in a dark place," till their own experience of the blessed effects produced by the gospel, prove an inward witness, the dawn of eternal life in their souls.

We might adduce many other arguments in confirmation of this truth, from the nature and tendency of the sacred oracles; the character of those in every age, who have most firmly believed them; the efficacy of the pure gospel on the minds and conduct of mankind, in rendering them wise, holy, peaceful and happy; and the manifold consequences which must follow, if all men did indeed repent of sin, believe in Christ, worship God spiritually, love him supremely, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. But

Digitized by Google

these few hints are sufficient to shew that our religion is no vain or doubtful matter, but an authenticated revelation from God; and that men oppose it, because it testifies of them that their works are evil, and cannot be made consistent with the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Neither is it a superfluous or unnecessary thing. Whatever plausible and soothing notions students in their retirement may entertain, facts undeniably prove, that reason, untutored by revelation, uniformly leads men into atheism, idolatry, impiety, superstition, or enormous wickedness. Renowned and elegant Greece and Rome sunk as deep into these absurd abominations as the barbarians whom they despised. The philosophical Athenians were ignorant worshippers of an unknown God, amidst their highest improvements; nor have the most celebrated modern unbelievers been preserved from most gross absurdities, or lamentable ignorance. How confused are their discourses, when they attempt to show, in what way a sinner may be justified before God! Or when they would instruct mankind in the method of conquering bad habits, resisting strong temptations, overcoming the world, or meeting death with humble, serious, and reflecting composure!

If then unaided reason, in its highest advancement, can give so little satisfactory information on these most important points, what must have been the state of the world at large, if revelation had not been vouchsafed? So far, therefore, from deeming it unnecessary, we ought to value it unspeakably more than gold and precious stones; and to relish it "as sweeter than honey and the honey-comb."

The message of God is no vain thing, because it is exactly adapted to the condition of mankind, and fully adequate to the case of the most enslaved sinner upon earth. If a man's crimes have been ever so numerous, complicated, and atrocious, during the whole course of a long life; if his propensities, habits, and connections, expose him to the combined force of many formidable temptations; and if his difficulties and distresses be urgent in the extreme,—yet, by attending to the word of the gospel in humble faith, he shall surely be guided into the way of peace, find effectual assistance in the path of duty, be extricated from all perplexities, made victorious over all enemies, and finally be brought to the enjoyment of eternal felicity. Indeed whenever we mistake our duty or our interest, or whenever we are cast down on any account, it may be said to us, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures;" and forget that "thus it was written, and thus it must be." We want no other directions or encouragements, than such as are contained in the Bible: nothing can be added to this perfect rule of faith and practice. All that men can do in this matter to good purpose, consists in calling the attention of mankind to the Scriptures, explaining their contents, and exhorting them to believe and obey the divine message; and if any one, whether he be a moralist or philosopher, an inventor of superstitions, or a pretender to new revelations, attempt to add to the Scriptures, or to amend any thing in them; he may be compared to an optician, who should undertake, by new discoveries, and well constructed glasses, to improve the light of the sun.

Nor is the message of Scripture a vain thing, or *a matter of small importance:* Moses therefore added, "because it is your life." "Whatsoever a man hath will he give for his life," is a maxim that is generally found true, though it was once spoken by the father of lies. The merchant throws his rich freight into the sea, when it endangers his life: and the patient rewards the surgeon for performing some torturing operation, when it is necessary to rescue him from death. In ordinary computations life is deemed our highest interest; capital punishment is regarded as the most formidable; and it is an *admired*, though often a proud and rebellious heroism, when a man prefers death to penury, ignominy, or bondage. Yet our Lord hath said, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear him, who hath power to destroy both body and soul

Digitized by Google

in hell." And "what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Our temporal life is not principally concerned in the subject before us,—but our future and eternal condition. When Christ declares, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal;" the same original word is used in both clauses: the punishment could not be *eternal*, if the person punished should at length cease to exist; and the strongest expressions of the copious Greek language, that language of speculating philosophers, are used in Scripture to denote the eternity of the punishment, prepared for the wicked in another world. We are not competent to determine what sin deserves, or how it behoves the Governor of the universe to shew his abhorrence of it. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is our wisdom to submit to his justice and to seek his mercy, and not to waste our lives in vain disputations concerning matters too deep for our investigation.

We must, however, close this part of the subject in a summary manner. It depends on the reception which we give the message of God, whether we shall for ever enjoy his inestimable favour, or feel the weight of his awful indignation; whether our capacity of reflection, memory, and anticipation, shall be our noblest privilege, or our most aggravated misery; whether we shall bear the holy image of God, or be given up to the unrestrained dominion of every hateful passion; and whether happy angels, or apostate spirits, shall be our companions during our eternal existence. In the meantime, this must also determine, whether in the present life we shall possess that peace of God which passeth all understanding, or resemble the tempestuous waters of the ocean, in the dissatisfied and unsettled state of our minds; whether we shall pass through life with comfort and usefulness, and meet death in joyful hope; or spend our days in vanity and vexation, and at length be driven away into darkness and despair.

The Scriptures certainly require all who would "declare the whole counsel of God," to use this decided language: and whatever plausibility may appear in the reasonings or conjectures of those that become the advocates of the heathen, whom St. Paul declared to be "without excuse;" it is impossible, consistently with Scripture, to entertain the least hope concerning persons who reject revelation, and prefer their own self-flattering imaginations to the sure testimony of God. It hath therefore been sufficiently shewn, that the subjects of which we treat, as far as we adhere to Scripture, are most certain, necessary, and important; and that, in comparison, all the objects which ambition, avarice, or sensuality pursue, are frivolous as the toys of children, and transient as a dream when one awaketh.

III. Then let us conclude the subject by a practical improvement.

It can scarcely be expected, that they, who avowedly disregard all religion, will trouble themselves to attend to these instructions: otherwise we might very forcibly insist on the folly and madness of their conduct. We would say to such men, do you act upon principle, or do you not? If you answer in the affirmative, you profess yourselves to be atheists, or at least to hold sentiments which are practically equivalent to atheism. But does any one of those frantic enthusiasts, whom you despise, imagine so wild an absurdity as they do, who ascribe this fair creation, in which wise contrivance and boundless goodness emulate each other, to blind chance or necessity; or imagine a Creator, who totally disregards the work of his own hands? But were this absurd principle, which contradicts demonstrable truths, as near to certainty as it is possible, what would you gain by it? Should you at last find yourselves mistaken, your loss would be infinite: should you be right in your notion, you have not the smallest advantage; unless you choose to own, that as *you* spend your lives, it will be an advantage to die like the brutes, and that the atheism of your understandings springs from the depraved affections of your hearts.

But if you allow, that there is a God, who created and governs the world,

Digitized by Google

on whom all are dependent, and to whom all are accountable: how infatuated must you be, to live as if there were none! Never to inquire what your Creator commands or forbids! To be indifferent whether he be pleased or displeased! Wantonly to do those things, against which your consciences protest, as contrary to the will of God! Bestowing no pains to avert his wrath, when you know you have offended him! But wasting your lives in palling sensualities, insipid dissipations, wearisome pursuits, and a constant succession of vain expectations, bitter disappointments, and multiplied crimes, till a hopeless death drops the curtain, and closes the mournful scene.

And are you then entitled, as persons of superior discernment and sagacity, to treat pious Christians with supercilious contempt, as men of weak intellects and disordered minds? When all the instances of credulity and indiscretion, which the whole company of religious people through all generations have exhibited, bear no manner of proportion to the madness and folly of an irreligious life.

Supposing however that you do pay some attention to this most important concern: is it not also evident from the subject we have been considering, that you ought to bestow great pains to discover the true religion, and to discriminate it from all others. Numbers are of opinion, that people should adhere to the religion in which they were educated: but does not this imply that they deem all religion a vain and trifling matter? A nation may retain some inconvenient usages, without much censure: but to support unjust and ruinous laws, because their fathers did so, would imply a most unreasonable and detestable obstinacy. Thus some circumstances in religion may perhaps be retained, because they are deemed venerable for their antiquity; but its grand essentials are our life, and we are ruined, if we prefer human tradition to divine revelation. Such an opinion vindicates the Jews in rejecting the gospel, and exculpates those who cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." It espouses the cause of Pagans, Mahometans, and Papists; while it condemns prophets, apostles, and zealous reformers: and in short, it considers it criminal to oppose any established error or imposition. But the monstrous deformity of this tenet must be visible, whenever it is brought forth to the light; and we need only exhort every one to consider the subject with application to himself, and to act accordingly. It will then be deemed most *rational* to examine with diligent and impartial care the evidences of divine revelation! and, if the mind be satisfied in this respect, daily to search the Scriptures, with earnest prayer for divine instruction, according to the apostle's exhortation, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."—But let it be also remembered, that multitudes study religion as a science, and thus adopt a Scriptural creed, yea, are useful in propagating the truth, who yet are not themselves truly religious. Nay, many have prophesied and wrought miracles, who have been at the same time workers of iniquity. Notions may float in the understanding, when they do not durably affect the heart, or influence the conduct: but unless the truth be an engrafted and sanctifying principle in the soul, it must be "held in unrighteousness;" and such a religion is indeed a vain thing, though vital Christianity is unspeakably valuable and important.

Our Lord requires his disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." We should set out in early youth with this most important business: but if we have wasted a great part of our lives already, we should immediately attend to it with proportionable earnestness and industry. We should begin every year, month, week, and day, with this one thing needful; to which the prime of our affections and the best of our hours should be dedicated: and all other pursuits if possible rendered subservient. "Labour not then," my friends, "for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you."

Digitized by Google

If this be neglected, all is lost, whatever else may seem to succeed: if this be secured, all things will surely turn out to our advantage.

While we therefore call upon you in the name of Christ, to strive to enter in at the "strait gate;" to deny yourselves and bear your cross for his sake; and to beware that no earthly object rival him in your affections: while we warn you, that it is impossible to serve God and Mammon, and remind you that the friendship of the world is enmity with God: or while we endeavour to prevail with you, "to count all things but loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him:"—what do we, but inculcate the maxims of heavenly wisdom? Does any prudent man hesitate to renounce an inferior interest, when it comes in competition with a greater, or to neglect some trivial concern, when business of the last importance demands his attention? And who, almost, refuses to part with a right hand, in order to preserve his life? But alas! "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

The worldly man, having selected his object, gives it the most decided preference; he adopts and persists in the most suitable means of success; he exercises self-denial in various ways, devises new expedients, never loses sight of his main point, and endeavours to render every thing, even religion itself, subservient to his grand design. But how different is the conduct of numbers who profess the gospel! How negligent are they of the means of grace! or how soon weary of attending on them! how trivial a matter serves as an excuse for omission, and how unwilling are they to venture or endure any thing in this momentous concern! Men in general are far more punctual to their commercial engagements, or even to their social appointments, than in the ordinances of God; and did lawyers or physicians study their several subjects, no more than nominal Christians do the Bible; or were the courtier as slack in waiting on his prince, as they are in coming to the throne of grace; how would men exclaim against their folly and inconsistency! Alas! even the true believer may reflect on the conduct of the prudent tradesman, the valiant soldier, and the candidate for royal or popular favour, till he be covered with shame and confusion.

But let us, my brethren, not yield to this supineness; let us examine the grounds on which we expect eternal life, as a prudent man would look into the title-deeds of a valuable estate. Let us endeavour to convince our children and relatives, by word and deed, that we seek these blessings for them also, as the grand concern: for alas, even where creeds and catechisms are taught, the conversation of the parlour, and the general system of education, often suggest an opposite conclusion. Let us consider, that we make the best use of our talents, and are the best friends to our country, and to mankind, when we most endeavour to promote the interests of true religion. And should we in this course meet with many discouragements, let us not be weary in well-doing, for assuredly we shall reap in due season, if we faint not.

Digitized by Google

SERMON II.

RELIGION MAN'S GREAT CONCERN.

DEUTERONOMY VI. 6—9.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them as a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates.

THE observation is not more common than just, "that if religion be any thing, it is every thing." If Christianity be true, the consequences of our present conduct are infinitely important: and while the infidel may be more atrociously criminal and extensively mischievous, the professed believer, who lives like other men, is the most inconsistent character in the world. The language of Scripture does not accord to that of modern times: wicked *Christians*, and *irreligious believers*, are never mentioned in the sacred volume: faith is never supposed to be separable from a holy life: all worldly men are represented as unbelievers, or as only possessing a dead faith; and all believers are spoken of as the servants of God, who live to his glory, and are distinguished from other men by the whole tenor of their conduct, and not merely by their principles. These things are as observable in the Old, as in the New Testament: for true religion has been *essentially* the same, ever since the fall of Adam; though many *circumstantial* alterations have taken place: and indeed the perfections of God, the wants of a sinner, and the nature of holiness and happiness, are in themselves immutable.

I shall therefore, without further introduction, proceed to discourse on the words of the text, as applicable to Christians, with an authority proportioned to their peculiar advantages. "These words which I command thee this day," even the great doctrines and precepts of the Bible, "shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children: and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes: and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates." It is, alas! too obvious, that professed Christians do not generally observe either the letter or the spirit of this exhortation: nay, that numbers of them would censure or ridicule any of their acquaintance, who should manifest a disposition to practise according to it! Whether this prove that most men among us are Christians only in name, or whether some more satisfactory account can be given of the undeniable fact, every one must be left to determine for himself.

I shall endeavour from the words of the text,

I. To point out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our unremitted attention.

II. Explain and illustrate the exhortation, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

III. Shew the reasonableness of such a conduct.

Digitized by Google

And may the Lord vouchsafe us his special help and blessing, while we meditate on this important subject! For it is astonishing and lamentable to observe, how slightly even they who seem to be religious pass over such urgent exhortations! So that while a vast majority of mankind are altogether asleep in sin, the rest seem not to be half awake to matters of infinite and eternal importance.

I. In pointing out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our unremitted and most earnest attention, we cannot begin more properly, than with the perfections and authority of God, and our relations and obligations to him. However men may allow these truths, it will yet be found, that their conduct in this respect marks very strongly the distinction between the religious and irreligious part of mankind. Who can imagine, that the gay, the sensual, the covetous, or the ambitious have a constant and serious recollection of that holy, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty God, in whom we all profess to believe? May we not rather conclude, that "God is not in all their thoughts;" at least, that they do not willingly and deeply consider his character and perfections, as described in the sacred Scriptures. Do such men habitually recollect the majesty and authority of the Lord, their obligation or accountableness to the Creator and Judge of the world? Do they act under a constant sense of his all-seeing eye? Do they endeavour to please him in their most secret and common actions; or by their inmost thoughts and motives? Do they seek happiness in his favour, and liberty in his service? Or do they, when conscious of having offended, rely on the mercy of God, and seek an interest in the salvation of his Son, as the grand object of their deliberate choice, and most fervent desires? I apprehend that the most admired and applauded characters, in Christian countries, are as entire strangers to this course of life, as the very pagans themselves. But the true believer walks with God; the thoughts of his presence and perfections frequently possess his mind, and habitually influence his conduct; and in his various occupations and pursuits, he seeks "not to please men, but God that trieth the hearts."

It is indeed one great end of our preaching, to convince men, that religion does not consist in coming once or twice a week to public worship, or at stated seasons to the Lord's table; but that these are merely appointed means of bringing them habitually to acknowledge God in every part of their conduct; that their actions, conversation, and dispositions may be influenced by a sense of his presence and authority; that pious meditations, ejaculations, and praises, may continually spring from the temper of their minds, as occasion requires; and that their daily employments, regulated by genuine piety, may be a constant succession of services to their Master who is in heaven. Who can deny that the law of God requires this at our hands? that the example of Christ recommends and enforces it? or that the apostle inculcates it, when he says, "Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Perfection indeed cannot here be attained; nor can we say what measure of this habitual recollection is essential to genuine piety; but if this be the nature of true religion when perfected, it must proportionably be the same in its lowest degrees. If we do not propose to ourselves a high standard, our actual attainments will be very low; and if the *nature* of our religion differ from all our ideas of the worship and holiness of angels, we shall doubtless be finally excluded from their society, as incapable of their holy felicity.

The eternal world is another subject, which demands our unremitted attention. Death and its important consequences; and the awful realities of that solemn season, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation," should be familiar to our thoughts, and frequently be made the subject of our conversation. Eternity! the shortness of time! the uncertainty of life!

Digitized by Google

the importance of this fleeting season of preparation for the tribunal of God! the sin, the folly and infatuation, of wasting it in the eager pursuit of perishing things, or in frivolous and pernicious amusements! By frequently recurring to these topics, we should endeavour to excite ourselves, and to "exhort one another, while it is called to-day; lest any of us should be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." A misspent day, or even an idle hour, must, on reflection, give pain to the man who duly considers the words of Christ, "Watch and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things which are coming on the earth, and to stand before the Son of man." "Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." "Be ye, therefore, ready also: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh."

Our chief business is not with men: our grand interest is not placed in earthly objects. The Lord himself is "he with whom we have to do;" and if we be indeed believers, "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This was the peculiar disposition and practice of all that cloud of witnesses which have gone before us. "Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him." Moses preferred the reproach of Christ, and the sufferings of God's people, to the riches, honours, and pleasures of Egypt:—for he "had respect to the recompence of reward." The Old Testament saints "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth." The primitive Christians "suffered joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and a more enduring substance." They "counted not the sufferings of this present time worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed;" and many of them considered death as their gain, that "being absent from the body, they might be present with the Lord." Yet, in these days, this kind of life not only appears visionary to profane scoffers and infidels; but many who profess and contend for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, seem not at all aware, that one grand difference between a believer and other men, consists in the decided preference which he gives to eternal things, above all the interests and enjoyments of this sublunary world. "To be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace."

The law of God is another of those interesting subjects, which ought to occupy a large share of our thoughts and conversation. This law, which is spiritual, holy, just, and good, is given to be the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our judgment, and it is written in the hearts of all true believers. Thus David exclaims, "Oh how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." "I esteem all thy precepts in all things to be right." "I love thy commandments above gold, yea above much fine gold;" and, "I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts."

Numbers of men, called Christians, prescribe to themselves no other rule than the law of fashion, custom, honour, or trade; that is the law of their own peculiar circle. Others judge of their conduct by some scanty maxims of morality, or their own notions of right and wrong: and few, even of those who profess to believe, seem willing to use the commandments of God for these important purposes.—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, thy mind, thy soul, and thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These are the two great commandments, in which the whole law is briefly comprehended. But who can fully explain such extensive precepts, or speak of them in terms of commendation equal to their excellency? There can be no part of our conduct, or desire of our hearts; no thought, word, or action whatever; which does not either agree or disagree with these two grand branches of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." With these, the believer, as far as he acts in character, compares himself continually; and thus determines whether he hath

Digitized by Google

acted right or wrong in the various circumstances and relations of life. By this rule he learns to decide in doubtful cases; and he keeps it in constant view, while he considers how he should spend his time, use his substance, or employ his talents; what connections he should form; whether he should contract or extend his acquaintance; what business or situation he should prefer; or how he should regulate his methods and habits of living. In short, he endeavours to conform himself to the law of God, as the man of fashion or of business does to the rules of the circle with which he is connected.

But when we have seriously considered the comprehensive, spiritual, and holy requirements of this perfect standard, we shall proportionably be convinced of numberless transgressions, and of immense deficiencies even in our best services: for "by the law is the knowledge of sin." We shall judge very differently of our own characters, than other men do; or than even we did, before we began to weigh ourselves in this balance of the sanctuary. When each successive hour, and all that passes in our imaginations and conduct, is tried by the law of loving God with all our minds, and our neighbour as ourselves, the boasted goodness of our hearts, the imagined innocency of our lives, the compensating efficacy of our meritorious actions, and the whole fabric of our self-complacency, vanishes as a dream when one awaketh. Then we readily understand that "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God;" and there no longer appears to be either paradox or absurdity in this part of the apostolical doctrine. That question becomes important to us, which perhaps we once deemed insignificant or speculative, "How shall man be just before God?" We inquire with increasing solicitude, "What must we do to be saved?" And we are prepared to welcome information on the method, in which the most perfect justice and holiness of God can consist with his abundant mercy, in pardoning and saving transgressors; without excepting even those who have committed the most numerous and heinous offences. Thus the peculiar doctrines of the blessed Gospel of God our Saviour, come regularly under our consideration, and open to our view, in their nature, glory, and value, in proportion as we judge ourselves by the holy commandment; and anxiously seek deliverance from the wrath to come.

It is very affecting to the serious mind to reflect on the supercilious disdain, with which men in general treat such inquiries, and those who are engaged in them. The natural philosopher, with an air of self-importance, considers his experiments on the properties of material substances, as an employment of superior excellency: and, after having spent many months in most exact and minute investigations, he will smile, with mingled pity and contempt, at the folly of his neighbour, who hath occupied a few weeks in studying the way of eternal salvation! Metaphysicians frequently deride all those, as discarding the use of their reason, who decide such questions according to the sure testimony of God! Cold formalists obviate all inquiry by saying, that 'a good life is every thing in religion:' and even men of business and pleasure suspend their eager pursuits to join the ridicule, to which those humble penitents are exposed, who seriously attend to this disregarded subject! Yet surely it is most reasonable for a condemned criminal to inquire in the first place, how he may obtain a pardon: and who can doubt, but that person will be most secure from the danger of a fatal mistake, who learns the way of approach and success from the Sovereign himself?

The subjects, that have been considered, directly make way for the right understanding of evangelical truth: the man, whose views have been described, will perceive that the gospel exactly suits his case, and is worthy of his most cordial reception. He will not object to the truths of Christianity because they are mysterious; he will neither despise them, under pretence of attending exclusively to practice, nor abuse the mercy of God as an encouragement to sin: he will perceive the connection and harmony of evangelical doctrines with the whole system of revelation; and will seek the pre-

Digitized by Google

mised blessings in the appointed way: his repentance and works meet for repentance will connect with the life of faith in the Son of God; while his faith will work by love, and love will sweetly constrain him to live to the glory of "him, who died for him and rose again." These truths will be the nutriment of his faith and hope; he will meditate on them from day to day; thence he will derive all his strength, motives, and encouragement for obedience: nor would his knowledge of the rule of duty suffice even for practical purposes, were he not influenced by the principles of the gospel.

These are some of the most important subjects to which we may suppose, that the exhortation of the text calls our peculiar attention, and did time permit, many others might be adduced. But we must proceed,

II. To explain and illustrate the exhortion itself, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

These things must be in *our own hearts*, before we can properly teach them to others, or make them the subject of our frequent conversation. We should therefore apply ourselves, with persevering assiduity, to obtain a comprehensive acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation; that we may understand them according to their connection, harmony, proportion, and practical tendency. Our memories should be stored with the precepts, examples, warnings, and promises of the Bible. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This cannot be done, unless we carefully attend to our Lord's exhortation. "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." "The hand of the diligent maketh rich:" and the man, whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates in his law day and night, shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." This man shall be blessed, and shall be a blessing to others.

Labour then, my brethren, to get thoroughly acquainted with the oracles of God: let your judgment be formed according to them: proportion your approbation of characters and actions by this divine standard. In this manner judge of your acquaintance, connections, and friends; and above all, judge thus of yourselves. Try by this rule every pursuit, attainment, or distinction among men: let your fears, hopes, desires, joys and sorrows be regulated according to it; that all the affections of your souls may be excited and influenced by the pure and animating principles of our holy religion. Thus, when fatigued with business or disgusted with the world, you will have a never failing source of refreshment, and a most salutary relaxation, to invigorate your weary powers, and recruit your exhausted spirits.

When the word of God is thus treasured up and ingrafted in our hearts, we shall be disposed and qualified to teach his truths and precepts to our relations, to speak of them among our friends, and to diffuse the knowledge of them in the circle of our acquaintance. This is strenuously enforced by the exhortation of our text. "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In reducing these rules to practice, much will be found to depend on various external circumstances. When the Christian possesses wealth or influence, and hath extensive connections, he ought to attempt great things: while a little may be done in a more obscure situation, by edifying discourse, letters, or the distribution of books; provided opportunities be watched and diligently improved. We allow, indeed, that conceited disputatious talkers, whose conduct does not consist with their principles, or who grossly violate the proprieties of relative life, are often a disgrace to religion: but when divine truth occupies the heart and influences the conduct, a man's ordinary conversation may be rendered very useful, in diffusing religious knowledge, and making others wise unto salvation.

They, however, who are placed at the head of families, should deem themselves peculiarly called upon to teach their children or servants. The ex-

Digitized by Google

amples of Scripture are in this respect very encouraging and instructive.—The Lord had given promises of special blessings to the posterity of Abraham, and he was made a principal instrument in preparing the way for their accomplishment. "I know him," saith God, "that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do judgment and justice, *that* the Lord may bring upon Abraham the thing that he hath spoken to him of." Gen. xviii. 19. "As for me, and my house," says pious Joshua, "we will serve the Lord." Cornelius the centurion, who "feared God with all his house," and who had pious domestics and even soldiers around him, though doubtless most of them had been educated Pagans, may be considered as a remarkable instance of the blessing attending this kind of religious instruction: while the awful doom of Eli and his family, through a neglect of this duty, may serve as a salutary caution to all who are tempted to indolence or timidity in this important concern.

The ancient method of rendering the truths and precepts of religion familiar to the minds of men, especially of children and servants, is described in the text: "Thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And why should the same method be less effectual at present, if it were properly employed? Did we daily instruct our households, by reading and explaining the Scriptures to them, along with family worship; and then frequently converse with seriousness on edifying subjects: did we take occasion from common occurrences, to direct the attention of those around us to the over-ruling providence of God, the fatal effects of sin, the lamentable evidences of human depravity, and the suitableness of the gospel to the state of the world; and did we joyfully embrace every opportunity of inculcating right principles, rectifying mistakes, and making pertinent remarks: young people would be more generally preserved from scepticism, and a considerable barrier would be placed to the incursions of infidelity and impiety. Our Lord himself hath taught us this way of improving conversation; in the most simple and easy manner imaginable, he deduced profitable instructions from every occurrence; and grafted the most important admonitions, even on the insidious questions and impertinent objections of his enemies. We cannot indeed expect to speak with his consummate prudence, and irresistible energy; yet we should remember that in this, as in all other things, he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps; and promised to give his disciples "a mouth and wisdom, which all their enemies shall not be able to resist."

We are also taught in Scripture to encourage young persons in asking questions on religious subjects, by giving them plain and satisfactory answers: and some institutions seem to have been in a measure intended to give occasion for such inquiries. Exod. xii. 36. 37. "The Lord established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law which he commanded our fathers; that they should make them known unto their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God." Psalm lxxviii. 5—8.

The neglect of this duty is a very dark sign of the present times. Children in general are trained up amidst those very vanities, which they who presented them for baptism solemnly vowed they should renounce. They are early initiated into the corrupt maxims and fashions of this evil world, and brought to join in its frivolous and fascinating pleasures; and instead of being cautioned against the dangers of conformity to it, are taught to fear nothing so much as the appearance of singularity. Nay, those persons who profess a serious regard to religion, often act as if they were anxious to give their children a relish for those seducing trifles, from which they themselves appear to be weaned; and afraid lest they should too early choose the good part that can never be taken from them! It is inexpressible how much these

Digitized by Google

things promote ungodliness, and prevent the permanent success of the gospel. But let us, my brethren, aim "to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" hoping and longing that they may be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood;" an holy and peculiar people, by whom true religion may be supported after our decease, and transmitted to future ages. In this view we may consider them as real blessings; but in what other light can a pious parent behold his beloved offspring without the most painful reflections?

We ought not, however, to confine our efforts within the limits of our own families, but should endeavour to propagate our religious principles in the world. What reason indeed can we have to be ashamed of them? Or how can we timidly conceal them without being ashamed of Christ and his words? We live it is true among men called Christians: yet it is almost deemed an outrage on good manners, to speak seriously of the doctrine and salvation of our Lord and master! Shall we then hold our peace, and sanction the conduct of a lukewarm or apostate generation by our example? God forbid! We are commanded to bind the great truths and precepts of his word, "as a sign upon our hands, and as frontlets between our eyes; and to write them on the posts of our houses, and on our gates." This can imply nothing less than an open profession, that we are the worshippers of God, and the disciples of Christ; that we believe the Scriptures, embrace the gospel, and make the commandments of the Lord the rule of our conduct. These things should be clearly understood by our friends and connections, that when they enter our houses they may say, 'God is worshipped in this family;' that they may be restrained from evil in our presence, by the consideration of our character and profession; and be prepared to hear from us such pious reflections, as may occur in the course of conversation.

We shall rejoice at the last day, to have our faith and piety made known before the assembled world: what then can induce us to conceal them at present, but fear of ridicule or reproach? We should recollect, therefore, that an intrepid profession of the truth, without ambiguity or prevarication, is expressly required by the Lord Jesus from all his disciples; that this is one grand means of promoting his cause in the world; that the scorn to which it may expose us, is a clear demonstration of the great contempt in which the divine Saviour is held even among his professed disciples; and that this is evidently a cross to be borne by us for his sake, "who bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Let us then,

III. Consider the reasonableness of such a conduct.

Should a liberal and honoured benefactor earnestly demand our attention to a message he had sent us; we should doubtless examine it with studious accuracy, and implicitly comply with his desires. Should a friend bequeath us a legacy, we should not be wanting in examining the favourable clause of his testament, and availing ourselves to the utmost of his kind remembrance. But the message of God, in all respects, is far more entitled to our strictest regard. He who made us, and against whom we all have sinned, condescends to teach us how we may escape eternal misery, and obtain eternal happiness! Is it not then most reasonable, that we should diligently observe his instructions, and recommend them with our whole influence? The world is against us; the broad road to destruction is thronged; false religion unites with impiety, in rendering our situation most perilous; God himself condescends to guide us in the safe and happy path; and shall we reject his counsels? Our own hearts are deceitful, the powers of darkness unwearied in their subtle efforts to delude us; and shall we not use every means of escaping their wiles, and warning others to elude their devices? New forms of delusion start up every day: shall we not then bestow pains to distinguish the truths of revelation from damnable heresies? Surely it is most reasonable, both to study the Scriptures, and to pray without ceasing for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that we may be kept from

Digitized by Google

the ways of the destroyer, established in the pure principles of Christianity, preserved from innumerable dangers, find unfailing resources of support and comfort in trying circumstances, be rendered useful in our respective stations, meet death with joyful hope, and leave the world in full assurance of everlasting felicity.

The knowledge and wisdom which may be derived from a careful investigation of the Scriptures, will be found of the utmost importance, even in conducting our temporal concerns. We shall thus learn the best discretion in estimating characters, and judging of men's pretensions and professions: be directed how to act even in respect of their prejudices and mistakes; and learn to accommodate ourselves to varying circumstances, without countenancing evil by improper compliances, or preventing our own success by violent opposition, where gentleness might have obviated the difficulty.

But the subject is too copious to be fully discussed on this occasion. It must suffice to observe, that the advantages of diligence and earnestness, in the grand concerns of our holy religion, far more than counterbalance the self-denial that it requires. For what is it, but bestowing pains to be happy and useful? to live and die in comfort; and to use proper means of rendering our children and relatives happy; that they too may serve their generation according to the will of God, leave the world with joyful hope, and meet with us in heaven. And are not these objects well deserving of our utmost diligence, and unwearied attention?

Let me then conclude with the observation which introduced the subject: 'If religion be any thing, it is every thing.' It must be our business in this world, if we would enjoy a warranted hope of felicity in the world to come: yea, it must be our element here, in order to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Every man's own conscience must decide, how far this is his character and experience; and every one must be left to apply the subject to his own case, for conviction, admonition, or encouragement. And may the Lord himself enable us to attend to these things, according to their immense and eternal importance; and teach us so to "number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Amen.

SERMON III.

ISAIAH'S VISION EXPLAINED AND APPLIED.

ISAIAH, VI. 5—8.

Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts:—Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me.

When Isaiah had already been employed for a considerable time in the prophetical office, he was greatly disconcerted by a remarkable vision, which he records in the chapter before us.—We ought not to imagine that things do outwardly exist, as they appeared to the minds of the prophets, when their senses were closed during the visions of the Almighty; but that they were impressed with such representations, as were suitable to convey the instruc-

Digitized by Google

tion which it was intended they should receive and communicate. The scene, therefore, of these emblematic discoveries was laid at the temple; every intervening veil was apparently removed; the most holy place was made manifest; and Jehovah was seen in glory above the mercy-seat, as on "a throne high and lifted up, and his train," (or the skirts of his flowing robes,) "filled the temple." This description evidently leads the mind to the idea of one in human form; and St John instructs us, that the prophet at this time saw "the glory of Christ and spake of him." John xii. 41. For indeed the glory of God is especially made known, not only to the church on earth, but also to the hosts in heaven, by the person and redemption of Emmanuel. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. iii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 12.

Above the other worshippers, and nearest to the throne, stood the Seraphim, the most exalted of the angelic host, who glow with love and zeal, like a flame of fire. Psalm civ. 4. These, in other respects appearing in human form, had each six wings; "with two of which they covered their faces," in token of the profound reverence with which they contemplated the majesty of the Lord, before whose uncreated glories their derived excellencies were eclipsed and disappeared: with two of them they covered their feet, as conscious that their services, though perfectly undefiled with sin, were not worthy to be noticed by the infinite and eternal God; and with their other two wings they did fly, an emblem of the celerity, alacrity, and delight, with which they execute the mandates of their Creator. At the same time they sang aloud in responsive strains, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Entirely filled with admiration of the divine majesty and holiness, they had no leisure to reflect with self-complacency on their own endowments, or to panegyrize one another. Such employments they leave to us poor sinful mortals, who amidst the obscurity of our fallen state, unaccustomed to contemplate any thing more splendid than the accomplishments of our fellow-worms, are apt to shine in our own eyes, or in those of each other, like glow-worms during the darkness of the night. But these bright seraphs, satisfied with the love of God, before whom they stand, desire no other commendation; and are wholly taken up in adoring the glorious holiness of Jehovah.

The threefold ascription of holiness to the Lord of hosts has generally been considered as an intimation of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and a reference to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, displayed in the salvation of sinners. Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Rev. iv. 8. While this song of praise was re-echoed by the seraphim, the pillars shook at every response: and smoke, or darkness, filled the whole temple, as when it was first dedicated by Solomon. The effect this awful scene had upon the mind of the prophet, is described in the words of the text, which may suggest the following subjects for our present consideration,—

I. The causes of the perturbation which Isaiah experienced on this occasion.

II. The peculiar nature and tendency of it.

III. The relief and encouragement which he received; and,

IV. The effects which were produced in his disposition and conduct.

I. The causes of the perturbation which Isaiah experienced on this occasion.

It appears at the first glance, that the prophet was on this occasion both alarmed and humbled; and that the glorious scene which he had been contemplating had caused this frame of mind. Indeed suitable views of the divine majesty and glory always produce proportionable humility, and by this touch-stone, spiritual illumination may be distinguished from that knowledge which puffeth up. When Job, to whose eminent piety the Lord himself had borne decided testimony, had been so carried away in the warmth of controversy, as to use irreverent language concerning the dispensations of provi-

Digitized by Google

dence; he was convinced of his presumption, and awed into submission, by discoveries of the divine majesty and glory; and exclaimed, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further." And again, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." He seemed to himself to be of some consequence, while he disputed with his friends, and vindicated himself from their unjust charge of hypocrisy: but when Jehovah spake to him from the whirlwind, he shrunk as it were into nothing, and his self-importance was changed into self-abhorrence. In like manner, when Peter saw a little of the Saviour's power and authority, in the draught of fishes which had been brought to his net, he fell down at his feet, and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But while discoveries of the majesty of God will awe the soul into self-abasement, the knowledge of his moral excellencies is the immediate cause of those humiliating convictions, by which sinners are rendered truly penitent, and induced to welcome the salvation of the gospel. And the prophet seems to have been especially affected by that view of the glory and beauty of Jehovah, which was the principal subject of adoring praises to the Seraphim before the throne. While men think little of our holy God, mistake his character, or continue in a great measure unacquainted with his perfections, commandments, and judgments; they compare themselves with their associates in disobedience, and estimate their conduct by some defective standard. Thus enveloped in darkness, they judge favourably of themselves, imagine they possess various excellencies, and even pretend to *merit* in the sight of God! Nor is this the case only of the moral and virtuous; for self-love will furnish the most criminal with some palliation of their vices; they will call them by a soft name, imagine others more faulty than themselves, and endeavour to compensate for undeniable and inexcusable transgression, by some pretended good actions or qualities!

But when the Lord directs the sinner's attention to the Scriptures, and makes known in some degree his own glorious holiness to the soul; deep conviction of sin is the infallible consequence, every plea is silenced, and the trembling criminal is even ready to despond, and deem himself lost beyond all hope of recovery.

This fully accounts for that change, which often takes place, in the opinion that moral and amiable persons entertain of themselves, when they have begun seriously to study the holy Scriptures. Their decent lives, on which they formerly reflected with abundant self-complacency, are now mentioned in very degrading language; and even their present strict and exemplary conduct is accompanied with very humble confessions of guilt and defilement. This excites the astonishment of those, who judge by other rules; and they are apt to suspect, either that such persons have secretly practised very gross enormities, or that they use this language in a mere affectation of humility. But in reality the same characters and actions must appear good or bad, according to the balance in which they are weighed: no wonder therefore that they, who have lately become acquainted with an holy God and his perfect law, and who have learned to judge by another standard, are compelled to bring in a verdict against themselves, though before they trusted that they were righteous and despised others. Thus St Paul informs us, that "he was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived and he died." He had entertained very favourable thoughts of his own moral and religious character; but when his understanding was opened to "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" he condemned himself as the chief of sinners: nay, after all his labours and proficiency in Christianity, he was in his own esteem "less than the least of all saints."

But these things were also illustrated to the mind of the prophet by the

Digitized by Google

worship and services, which the Seraphim presented before the Lord of hosts. The holy angels "excel in strength," and are glorious beyond the conception of mortal men: even the most eminent saints have been dismayed at their benign appearance, or tempted to render them divine honours. Yet these exalted spirits appeared in vision, as engaged in adoration of the great Jehovah; uniting deep humility with their most exalted praises; and manifesting the fullest conviction that their spotless services were inexpressibly beneath the excellency and greatness of that God whom they worshipped. This view seems to have greatly conduced to throw the prophet's mind into that perturbation, which he discovered on the occasion.

Men in general keep each other in countenance, while they rest satisfied with a form of godliness. They go to a place of worship, and to the Lord's table; read or repeat a prayer and a thanksgiving; and please themselves with the idea that they have *done their duty*; nay, they have scarcely an idea of a more spiritual worship. But when their attention is directed to the devout aspirations of David, Daniel, and other holy men of God; especially when they contemplate the adorations of the heavenly hosts, as described in the sacred Scriptures; they become sensible by the comparison, that they have been, heedlessly or presumptuously, presenting to the glorious Jehovah a formal, defiled, and hypocritical service, "drawing near to him with their lips, while their hearts were far from him." But this very properly leads us,

II. To consider of the peculiar nature and tendency of that inward perturbation, which caused this eminent servant of God to exclaim, "Woe is me, for I am undone."

Isaiah was called when young to the prophetical office; and we may thence conclude that he had been preserved by divine grace from every evil way, and had dedicated his earliest days to the service of God. He discharged the sacred trust confided to him for above sixty years; yet we do not find, during this long period, that he ever acted inconsistently with his sacred ministry. In his private deportment and public work, he seems to have sustained a most unexceptionable character: nor have we any proofs of his sinfulness, but those found in his own confessions. Yet on this occasion, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his own guilt and pollution, that he was almost ready to lie down in despair. Some persons indeed render his words thus: "Woe is me, I am *struck dumb*." 'He was struck dumb,' says Bishop Lowth, 'because he was a man of polluted lips, and dwelt among a people of polluted lips; and was unworthy either to join the Seraphim in singing God's praises, or to be the messenger of God to his people.' It is however evident, that he was so alarmed and humbled, because "his eyes had seen the King the Lord of hosts," that "his mouth was stopped, he became guilty before God," and he feared, lest his religious services and prophetical labours should increase his condemnation. This however did not arise from any immoralities or impieties which he recollected; or from conscious hypocrisy or unfaithfulness in his ministry: but from the conviction of his mind, that his best duties were exceedingly polluted; whether he considered the holy majesty of the Lord to whom they were presented, or compared them with the exalted worship of the heavenly hosts. He would no doubt reflect, with shame and sorrow, on his want of reverence and humility, in his religious performances; on the wandering imaginations which distracted his attention; on the languor of his affections; and on his want of zeal, love, and admiring gratitude, even in his most fervent praises and thanksgivings. He might also, perhaps, be conscious of a corrupt self-complacency and regard to the opinion of men, mingling even with his endeavours to glorify God; and that he had felt but little delight in those employments, which angels deem their highest privilege, and in which they enjoy unalloyed felicity.

As the prophet of the Lord, he had likewise delivered many awful messages to the rebellious Jews: but this vision made him afraid, lest he too

Digitized by Google

should fall under condemnation, for executing so important an office from corrupt motives, with a divided heart, and in an improper manner.

He was at the same time convinced, that he "dwelt among a people of polluted lips." The Israelites were distinguished from other nations, as the worshippers of Jehovah; and when the prophet compared himself with them, he supposed that his services were pure and spiritual. But he now perceived, that he ought not to be thus satisfied; for when their religious duties and professions were brought forth to the light, and viewed in connection with the adoration of the Seraphim, it was manifest that God might justly reject them with abhorrence. It was therefore more proper for him to imitate the lepers, who covered their lip, and cried, 'Unclean! unclean!'

These observations illustrate the apostle's declaration, "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Great diversity is indeed found in the moral conduct of men; and the Judge of the world will proportion the punishments of the wicked to the number and aggravation of their crimes: but in this one respect, there is no difference, "for all have sinned." The most virtuous and religious; even they who have served the Lord from their earliest days in genuine piety, must fall down before him in deep humility; and not only confess that they have been guilty of numerous omissions, and deviations from the rule of duty, in thought, word, and deed, but that their very services have often been the fruit of polluted lips. Nor could they ever have been satisfied with them, had they not dwelt among sinners like themselves; and had not their views of that glorious God whom they professed to worship been faint and confused.

Let any man carefully and impartially examine his own devotions, in the closet, in the house of God, or at the Lord's table: let him close every duty or every Sabbath, with endeavours to ascertain the degree of spiritual worship, and of a corrupt mixture, which the all-seeing eye of an holy God must have witnessed in his performances; and I dare confidently foretell, that he will ere long cry out with the prophet, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags:" or in the language of the *judicious* Hooker, 'The best things that we do have something in them to be pardoned: how then can we do any thing meritorious or worthy to be rewarded? Our continual suit to the Lord is and must be, to bear with our infirmities and pardon our offences.' Thus "the Scripture concludes all under sin: that the promise which is by Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe!" Gal. iii. 22. For these are discoveries of sinfulness, from which no man can escape, when he weighs himself in the balance of the sanctuary: so that every one is left to his choice, either to condemn the spirituality of the law, and the holiness of the Lawgiver; or to submit to the righteousness of God, and to cry for mercy, saying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Thus humiliation cannot be too deep; we cannot be too sensible of our guilt and pollution, or too entirely delivered from self-confidence. But we may easily be too much *discouraged*, and through despondency neglect the means of grace, and the duties of our station. Many persons, having discovered with great alarm their guilt and danger, and being convinced, by painful experience, of their inability to resist temptation, or to keep their resolutions; have rushed impetuously into wickedness, impiety, or infidelity, to obtain deliverance from the reproaches of their own consciences: and probably but few are duly humbled, without passing through a measure of discouraging terrors. Even the prophet was on this occasion dismayed, as well as laid low in self-abasement: and if seasonable encouragement had not been afforded, the very intention of the vision would have been counteracted, and he unfitted for the arduous services to which he was called.

III. Then we consider the relief and encouragement which he received. We are not indeed warranted to expect direct assurances by immediate

Digitized by Google

revelation; yet the emblems of this vision aptly represent the way in which the convinced sinner finds peace and hope, connected with increasing humiliation.—It has been remarked, that the scene of this vision was the temple: the altar of burnt-offering was therefore full in view, on which the daily sacrifices and occasional oblations were consuming, by the fire that came down from heaven. The blood of numberless innocent animals slain in sacrifice, and their bodies consumed to ashes, that guilty men might be pardoned and blessed, were constant declarations that sinners deserved death and the fiery wrath of God in another world; and that deliverance could only be obtained by faith in the promised Redeemer, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." From this altar one of the Seraphim took a live coal, and applied it to the prophet's lips, assuring him that his "iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged."

No endeavours were used to comfort Isaiah by persuading him, that he thought too ill of his own character and services; no intimation was made, that the vision had bewildered his mind, and inspired groundless alarms. On the contrary, the heavenly messenger of peace seemed to allow that "he was a man of polluted lips," and that his present judgment of himself was according to truth: but he assured him, that his guilt was removed by the atoning sacrifices, and by faith in the typified Redeemer. When Simon the Pharisee disdained the weeping penitent, who washed our Lord's feet with her tears, *he* did not vindicate her character or palliate her guilt; but graciously noticing her repentance, faith, and love, he declared, that "her sins which were many were forgiven." This is the uniform method of Scripture: but numbers endeavour to encourage trembling sinners, by arguing them into a more favourable opinion of themselves, or by pointing out certain good actions or qualities, which may counterbalance their offences. Such are physicians of no value. They administer fatal opiates to the lethargic, when they have been in a measure awakened: and they prolong the distress of the contrite and poor in spirit. No man is terrified merely by the opinion that his sins are numerous and heinous; but through unbelief, ignorance, or confused notions of the divine mercy, and of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour. These are therefore the subjects on which we should principally insist, if we would bring the distressed in conscience to permanent comfort and stable peace. "Faith comes by hearing;" and while we point out "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," we do our part to apply "the live coal from the altar" to the trembling sinner's lips. For when a man is brought to seek encouragement, not from himself or any of his services, but from the infinite mercies of God, through the atoning blood of Christ; and to perceive the Saviour's power and willingness "to save unto the uttermost all that come to God through him:" he will soon rise superior to his desponding fears, and possess "a good hope through grace," that his "sins though many are forgiven;" or at least, that his iniquity will at length be purged away.

But whoever may be the messenger of peace to the broken in heart, the Holy Spirit is the author and giver of this blessing. "When the comforter is come," saith our Lord, "he shall convince the world of sin:" and "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you." John xvi. 8—15. When humiliating convictions have prepared the heart to welcome a free salvation, the Divine Comforter enables the sinner to see the glory of God, and the harmony of his attributes, in the person and redemption of Christ: thus he finds peace and joy in believing, and at length "abounds in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost!" This consolation is the effect of regenerating grace, and accompanied by a new creation of the soul to holiness. The faith that justifies is living and active: it works by love of God and man; purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; and thus renders the believer fruitful in good works, to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. The live coal from the altar may therefore be considered as an emblem of those spiritual affections, that are kindled in the believer's heart

Digitized by Google

by the Holy Ghost, which prepare, animate, and even constrain him, to devote his talents to the glory of God, and to employ them according to his commandments. This is the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and *of fire*, with which Jesus baptizes his true disciples: these sacred influences penetrate and enlighten the mind, warm and elevate the affections, consume the dross of low and carnal passions, and transform the whole soul into the very nature of that divine agent by whom they are produced.

IV. Then let us proceed to consider the effects of this encouragement, on the prophet's disposition and conduct.

The vision had struck him dumb, filled him with consternation, and indisposed him for his prophetical office. But now hearing the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" he answered without hesitation, "Here I am, send me."—Neither the consciousness of his unworthiness and insufficiency, nor the prospect of difficulties, perils, or self-denial, produced the least reluctancy to the important and arduous service. His love to the Lord and zeal for his glory rendered him willing to go any whither, to any person, or on any message. He was ready to face a persecuting tyrant or an enraged multitude; to travel over mountains and seas, or through inhospitable deserts. He declined not hardship, poverty, or neglect; but was so desirous, that the name of God should be hallowed, his kingdom promoted, and his will done on earth, even as in heaven, that he exulted in the thought of being employed as an instrument in such a work. He could not indeed *equal* the fervent zeal and rapturous worship of the Seraphim: but he desired to *emulate* the promptitude and alacrity, with which they performed the commands of their Creator. Nay, he made no objections or excuses, when he was sent to pronounce the condemnation of the rebellious Jews, and to prove an occasion of their judicial blindness for a warning to all others, who "hate the light because their deeds are evil."

These effects of genuine encouragement to the broken in heart were by no means peculiar to the prophet. They will not indeed follow from an *unscriptural* assurance of forgiveness; but they are inseparable from comfort obtained by the exercise of living faith in Christ, under the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, speaking of his abundant labours and sufferings, adds, "Having obtained mercy we faint not;" and afterwards, "For the love of Christ constraineth us: because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live, should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again." 2 Cor. iv. 1. v. 14, 15. It was "his earnest expectation and hope,—that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or death;" Phil. i. 20, 21.—other "things moved him not, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Acts xx. 24. Deep humiliation for sin, firm confidence in the mercy of God, gratitude to the Divine Saviour "who loved him and gave himself for him," zeal for his glory, and compassion for perishing sinners, combined in rendering him superior to all other hopes and fears, and prepared him for most unwearied exertions, and patient sufferings, in making full proof of his sacred ministry.

We allow that the subject applies with peculiar propriety to the case of those who are engaged in the same good work: but all Christians "are bought with a price, that they may glorify God with their bodies and spirits which are his." They all love the Lord Jesus Christ on the same grounds, though not in equal measure; they partake of "like precious faith" with that of the apostles; and "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. When therefore the deeply humbled sinner has been delivered from gloomy fears of deserved wrath, and enabled to rejoice in Christ and his pardoning love; he will certainly inquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Nor will he, when under the lively impressions

Digitized by Google

of admiring love and gratitude, be disposed to think any sacrifice too costly, any labour too great, or any danger too imminent, to which he may be called, in his attempts to serve and honour his beloved benefactor. This causes him to consider, in what way he may most effectually recommend the salvation of Christ to his fellow-sinners, or be useful to that flock which he "purchased with his own blood." These reflections will frequently employ his thoughts, whether he be a minister of religion, a magistrate, a steward of the unrighteous mammon, possessed of influence, or endued with natural and acquired abilities; or whether, on the contrary, he live in a private and obscure station,—a labourer, a servant, in deep poverty, or even in a state of slavery. And, whatever be the Christian's outward situation and circumstances, provided he aim to serve the Lord Jesus by a conscientious attention to his several duties, in honesty, quietness, and contentment; he will be enabled to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, and as certainly meet with a gracious acceptance, as if he were sent, like Isaiah and Paul, to carry his message to the church and to the world.

The performance of relative duties, even when the most unkind returns are experienced; strict integrity under heavy losses and in trying circumstances; patience and meekness, amidst sufferings and injuries, are in some respects equivalent to the prophet's alacrity, in undertaking the painful service allotted him. And, in proportion as the believer can unite deep humility, with assured hope and fervent zeal, he will act with decision according to the commands of his Lord, and the opportunities or advantages afforded him. But if pride warp his steady aim and mar his simplicity, or negligence make way for guilt and alarm; he will find himself in all respects indisposed for difficult, perilous, or self-denying services. When discouragement prevails, "the hands hang down and the knees wax feeble:" a man in this case scarcely finds himself at liberty to speak a word on religious subjects, for the instruction even of his own family; and still less to attempt any thing of a more arduous nature for the glory of God and the benefit of his church. When David had been grievously overcome by temptation, he found that conscious guilt rendered him incapable of renewing his bold and zealous endeavours in the service of God. He therefore prayed, "Open my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may shew forth thy praise." But when the joy of God's salvation is restored, the lively exercise of every holy affection renders a man ready to say, "Here I am, send me;" 'If so poor a worm as I am, may glorify thy name, O Lord, I would thankfully yield myself to thy disposal, that I may be employed in any way, which may seem good in thy sight.'—If, then, these be indeed the effects of such humbling and encouraging views of the Lord and heavenly things as have been described, we ought certainly to inquire with great seriousness, whether we have learned or experienced any thing of the same nature?—And this may introduce an address to different descriptions of persons.

There are numbers, who do not wish to be thought infidels or irreligious; but call themselves believers, render some worship to God, and respect the name of Christ, and the leading truths of Christianity: yet they by no means think that they are altogether sinful, and exposed to just condemnation even for the defilements of their religious duties. They adopt various methods of eluding the inferences we draw from the general declarations of Scripture, concerning the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; and object to every attempt made to convince them, that they themselves, as well as Gentiles and wicked Jews, are included in these unrestricted charges. These appear to them hard sayings; because they deprive them of every plea, undermine the foundation of their hope, and exclude all boasting and self-preference.—But, if you have been used to reason and object in this manner, let me earnestly intreat and conjure you, seriously to answer the following questions:—Do you really think your own hearts, characters, and services, to be more holy and excellent than those of Job, Isaiah, Daniel, or Paul? Or do you suppose that your superior sanctity is proportioned to

Digitized by Google

the difference of the language you use in speaking of your virtues and duties? If you cannot without affection adopt their humiliating expressions, it must arise from one of these causes: either your conduct and character are far more holy than theirs were; or they knew far more of God and of themselves than you do. You are either much better men; or you are much less acquainted with those things, which are essential to a right judgment of characters and actions.

When the apostle said, "*That* God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" he assigned the real cause of the lowly opinion which eminent saints have ever entertained of themselves: and a want of this divine illumination gives occasion for that favourable estimate which numbers form of their virtues and characters. If then this be the case, or if there be the least probability that it is so, would it not be wise in you, my friends, to intreat the Lord, that he would "open your understandings to understand the Scriptures:" and would it be improper for you frequently to meditate with fixed attention on the glorious perfections and holy commandments of God? Let me affectionately beseech you to compare the duties, on which you depend, with the standard of holy writ; to watch your own hearts, while engaged in religious duties; and to examine impartially your motives in those services, to which you annex some confused idea of merit, and that you hope will make amends, in part at least, for the undeniable defects of your character. A day approacheth, in which every eye shall behold a far more glorious scene, than that which overwhelmed the mind of the prophet Isaiah. The divine Saviour will appear "in his own glory, and in the glory of the Father, with all his holy angels." Then every action will be weighed in an impartial balance; every character fully made known; and every unpardoned transgressor struck dumb in the presence of his Judge; or only able to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" while the awful words, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," shall fill him with terror, and sink him into despair. But at present there is hope: and those discoveries of guilt which tend to humble us, and prepare us for welcoming the salvation of God, should be considered as inestimable mercies, the forerunners of "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

2. But perhaps, these subjects have rendered you uneasy and dejected; and you have on that account deemed it best to divert your attention from them, and at any rate, to keep on good terms with your own consciences. You therefore neglect the Scriptures, and such books, company, or preaching, as formerly disquieted you; and hearkening to worldly counsellors, seek relief from diversions, indulgences, or a hurry of business; or perhaps try to dispel melancholy by a cheerful glass. Thus numbers close their eyes against the light, because they hate it; till the Lord gives them up to judicial blindness.

My beloved fellow-sinners, as you value your immortal souls, do not yield to such temptations. Do not shrink from the discovery of your real character and condition while hope remains. The knowledge of the disease is the first step towards recovery: but a groundless imagination, that there is no danger, is the common prelude to an incurable prevalence of the malady. As reasonable agents, examine this matter with an accuracy and impartiality, proportioned to its importance: that in case your confidence of safety should be found a mere presumption, you may now seek and obtain that inward satisfaction, which the prophet felt, when assured that "his iniquity was taken away and his sin purged." Can you doubt, whether it be better to discover your danger now, or to remain strangers to it, till God shall call you to receive your eternal retribution?

But are any of you so deeply convinced of sin, as to be ready to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" Let me caution you, my brethren, against desponding fears. The wreck and ruin of self-confidence makes way for evangelical

Digitized by Google

hope. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners, to seek that which was lost, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, to reconcile enemies by the blood of his cross, to receive gifts for the rebellious, to justify the ungodly, to sanctify the unholy: to give life to the dead, strength to the helpless, liberty to the captive, and felicity to the wretched. He invites all who are athirst, yea, all that are willing, to come and buy of him the blessings of salvation, without money, and without price. "Him that cometh unto me," saith the Saviour, "I will in no wise cast out." "Behold then the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." He is "the author and finisher of faith;" and he hath pointed out to you the proper way of seeking peace and salvation, in these most instructive and encouraging words; "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Matt. vii. 7, 8.

But some hearers of the gospel are sufficiently confident that their sins are forgiven, and that they have experienced that change which is described in the Scripture: yet they are not disposed to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me." They show no zeal for the honour of God,—no readiness for self-denying services,—no tokens of being constrained by the love of Christ to live as his devoted servants. It does not appear that their terrors were accompanied by humiliation and hatred of sin, or their comforts by the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. But let us all beware of this delusion; "for every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Finally, my Christian brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God, to desire an increase of that spiritual knowledge which produces humility; but at the same time to watch against discouraging fears, while conscious of integrity in your professed faith and love, and your desire to honour the Lord by thankful obedience. For these indulged and needless apprehensions render the mind too feeble for active service, or patient suffering; and they give your religion a forbidding and unamiable aspect. Let us therefore unite all our contemplations on other subjects, with frequent meditations on the mercy and grace of God our Saviour; be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by evil tempers or a selfish behaviour; and diligent in every means of grace. Above all, let us pray without ceasing for such a sweet sense of the Lord's pardoning mercy and abundant grace, as may animate all our endeavours to shew the holy tendency of our principles, and to make those "ashamed who would falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ."

SERMON IV.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE DIVINE LOVE.

1 JOHN, IV. 8.

God is Love.

THE sacred writers do not inculcate holy practice from such considerations as are commonly suggested by moralists and philosophers. The beauty of virtue, its utility to mankind, and its benign effects on the health, peace, interest, and reputation of the possessor, may be mentioned with propriety as subordinate recommendations: but the authority, command, example,

Digitized by Google

and glory of God, constitute the primary motives and ultimate object of genuine holiness; and every duty should be enforced by the encouragements and obligations of the gospel. "Beloved," says the aged apostle, "let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God: for GOD IS LOVE.—In this was manifested the love of God towards us; because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Let us then,

I. Inquire how such compendious propositions as that of the text should be understood.

II. Illustrate the truth and importance of it, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with mankind.

III. Point out certain perverse inferences which are frequently deduced from it.

IV. And Lastly, make some practical use of the subject.

I. In what manner ought we to understand such compendious propositions as that of the text?

There is a peculiar curse, as it were, connected with indolence and levity in the grand concerns of religion. If a man will trifle in matters of the last importance, and if instead of carefully examining the meaning of an expression, as it stands in the context, and forms a part of a consistent revelation, he only attend to the mere sound of the words, allowing his prejudices and passions to interpret them; he will surely be taken in a snare, and perhaps left to wrest the Scriptures to his own destruction. The diligent and faithful servant will not only consider a few words of the commands or directions of his master, but he will observe the whole of them, weigh their import, and endeavour fully to understand them. This is the proper use of reason in respect of divine revelation. We are neither authorized nor qualified to sit in judgment on the testimony of God, to reject any part of it as useless or injurious,—to propose alterations, or to make additions. All such attempts are both absurd and presumptuous in the extreme. But our rational powers are the gift of God, to whom we are accountable for our use of them: and as we should so erly examine what ground we have to believe the Scriptures to be a divine revelation; so we ought to study them with diligence and teachableness; and depending on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, endeavour to find out the real meaning of every proposition contained in them.

We meet with several comprehensive declarations in the sacred oracles, which should always be explained by comparing them with such passages as more fully state and unfold the doctrines of Christianity. The apostle John, in another place, says, that "God is light:" James affirms, that "He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning:" and Paul declares, that "Our God is a consuming fire." Now, a man would not think of inferring from this last expression, that the Lord cannot exercise mercy, but must punish and destroy all sinners without exception; and this may shew us, that limitations are also implied, when it is said, that GOD IS LOVE.

"Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;" if then the Lord's name be *holy*, he is *holiness* as certainly as he is *love*. The same might be shewn in respect of all his perfections; except that love takes the lead, as it were, in all the displays which he makes of his glorious character.

We discourse indeed on such subjects like children; we are wholly incapable of conceiving aright of the divine nature; the attributes of the Deity doubtless exist and operate with a simplicity that we cannot explain, and probably there is not that entire distinction between the effects of mercy, justice, truth, and holiness, in the divine nature and conduct, which appears to our contracted minds. Yet it may encourage us, under this

Digitized by Google

our conscious incapacity, to reflect that the Lord himself speaks to us in our own language; as more conducive to our benefit, though less flattering to our pride. Philosophers, it is true, frequently reject the style of Scripture, and attempt to prove, that there cannot be any thing in the divine nature which can properly be called wrath, indignation, or avenging justice. But, whatever there may be in such speculations, when cautiously managed; or whatever use may be made of them, in teaching us to exclude from our thoughts concerning the infinite God, every idea which originates from the corrupt passions of our fallen nature: it is evident that this is not the best method of addressing mankind; neither the most intelligible, impressive, or useful: for it is not the style of the only wise God himself. In speaking to us, he has seen good to adopt that kind of language, which is commonly used by the unlearned, that is by an immense majority of the human species.

We must therefore continue to discourse of the divine attributes, as distinct though harmonious: and when we read that "God is love," we must suppose that a different instruction is intended, than when we are told, that "Our God is a consuming fire." The declaration that the Lord is "a holy and just God," has a different meaning from the encouraging assurance, that "He is merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." Yet these distinct attributes perfectly harmonize in the divine character, and only *seem* to limit each other: for the Lord is infinite in wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and truth; exactly as if each attribute subsisted alone in his incomprehensible nature.

We must not, however, imagine, when it is said, that God is love, or truth, or vengeance, that these properties are so essential to him, that they cannot but act to the utmost in all possible cases; as fire cannot but burn, whether the effects be useful or destructive; or as water must rush downward, when obstructions are removed, whether it fertilize or deluge the country.—We should remember that the Lord acts with most perfect freedom, and unerring wisdom, "according to the counsel of his own will." It is therefore impossible that any divine attribute could have been exercised in a greater degree, or in a different manner than it hath been; because the works of the Lord's power, and the effects of his justice and love, have been exactly as many and great, as infinite wisdom determined they should be.

We may perhaps discover a faint illustration of the subject, in the conduct of two affluent persons, both apparently very liberal. The one not duly estimating the real value of riches, or the true ends of generosity, scatters abroad, with a lavish hand, till he exhausts the very resources of his bounty; while his indiscriminate liberality often encourages vice, and does more harm than good to society. The other considers his wealth as an improveable talent: he gives and spends only when he judges that it will answer some good purpose; he frequently rejects importunate applications, but on other occasions he is bountiful without waiting to be solicited. He studies to exercise beneficence in consistency with justice, and to retain the ability of permanent usefulness: he aims to render his liberality subservient to the best interests of mankind, and uniformly to discountenance sloth, profligacy, and ungodliness.—And thus, while he seems to limit his bounty, he renders it more abundantly and durably useful, by regulating it with prudence and discretion.—In like manner, the wisdom and justice of God may appear to restrain the exercise of his love: but they only direct it in that manner, which is most worthy and honourable to his name, and render it impossible that any thing should be done of a contrary nature and tendency.

It may therefore suffice in general to observe, that the Lord, in communicating good, and exercising mercy, acts freely and according to his own perfections, and not by constraint, or reluctantly; that loving-kindness is his peculiar honour, which adds lustre to all his other attributes; that he delighteth in goodness and mercy, and rejoiceth in his boundless power of communicating felicity; that he is not in any respect less holy, just, and true,

Digitized by Google

than if he had shewn no mercy; and that it is impossible he should communicate more happiness, upon any other plan, than he actually will communicate in that way which his infinite wisdom hath devised; whatever ignorance or presumption may imagine or assert.

II. Then we proceed to illustrate the truth and importance of the doctrine contained in the text, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with the human race.

This will be rendered very evident, by considering a gradation of events, in which the Lord hath exercised love and mercy to the full extent of the explanation already given; yea, far beyond all that ever could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had it not been revealed.

Let us then endeavour to realize, as far as such poor worms are able, the infinite and self-existent God, from all eternity possessed of such essential glory and felicity, as were incapable of increase or diminution.

Thus circumstanced, he could have no other possible inducement but love, or a disposition to delight in communicating happiness, in creating the universe, and producing a vast variety of beings capable of life and enjoyment. The inanimate creation was formed perfectly good, and exactly suited to the use and benefit of living creatures. The numerous orders of these, from the invisible animated atom, to the bright Seraph before the throne, were all made complete in their kind, adapted to the place and design of their existence, and capable of a measure of enjoyment: and, except as sin has deranged the original constitution of infinite love, no creature is left destitute of a degree of happiness equal to its capacity. In meditating, however, on this subject, we must recollect that "the creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," through the sins of man: his cruelty and tyranny add immensely to the sufferings of innocent animals, and he is punished in them, as his property and the subjects of his original dominion.

It is also worthy of observation, that no rational creature has ever been deprived of that adequate felicity allotted to it, except in the case of transgression; at least we have no intimation of such a fact, either in the works or in the word of God. None has been degraded to an inferior situation, rendered uncertain in respect of the future, or distressed by terror, bitterness, or vanity. On the contrary, we have every reason to conclude, that the capacities of all obedient creatures continually expand; that their enjoyment proportionably increases; and that they all will become more and more blessed to all eternity. In these things surely God is Love.

If the case of infants should be thought an exception, seeing they suffer and die without personal criminality; we may observe, without entering upon an intricate controversy, that all who believe the Bible, must allow the human race to have become sinful and mortal by the fall of Adam: and they who reject revelation, will not find less difficulty than others, in accounting for the present condition of mankind. If, then, every branch fell when the root was overthrown: "if we are born in sin, and the children of wrath;" it behoves us to be silent on this subject, and to wait for the clearer light of the great decisive day. For indeed it is highly probable, that the case of infants will not only then appear consistent with the divine justice, in respect of their present sufferings, but one grand display of the divine mercy and goodness, in the felicity by which these sufferings were succeeded.

The Lord having created various orders of rational creatures, hath manifested his love, by condescending to become their moral Governor. Infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, are indispensably requisite in the Sovereign of the universe. Such a government must be infinitely perfect, and of the highest possible advantage to all creatures. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;" for nothing, but enmity and rebellion, can be dissatisfied with this arrangement. The law, also, being holy, just, and good, was dictated by perfect love. Like a wise and kind father, the Lord requires us to love him with all our hearts, and to love others as ourselves:

Digitized by Google

every other requirement may be readily resolved into these two great commandments; and if they were universally obeyed, universal harmony and felicity would be the consequence. Yet this is the law, against which the corrupt passions of man's heart rise in desperate enmity!—Who then can deny that GOD is LOVE?

But the law is enforced by an awful sanction, and it denounces an awful curse against every transgressor: what then shall we say to this? It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that the punishments threatened in the law, and inflicted by the justice of God, result from love directed by infinite wisdom: not love of the individuals, whose final condemnation is determined, but enlarged benevolence to universal being through eternal ages. This however would carry us too far from our subject: it must therefore suffice to observe, that in the government of accountable creatures, who act voluntarily, and are influenced by motives, the denunciation of punishment must form a part of the system: and if this punishment be only inflicted on the disobedient, and do not exceed the heinousness of their crimes; while it tends to retain multitudes in obedience, and preserve the universe from the effects of general rebellion, it must prove a public benefit, and consist with wise and holy love. That must be the most beneficent plan, which secures the greatest, most extensive, and permanent advantages to the most excellent part of moral agents: and the philosophical notion, that the felicity even of sinful creatures is the ultimate end proposed to himself by the Governor of the world, is not more repugnant to Scripture, than to the common sense and opinion of mankind in similar cases. A wise ruler of a nation, in proportion as he loved his people, would be careful, by good laws impartially executed, to restrain the ill-disposed from injuring their fellow-subjects, and disturbing the peace of the community: and if this made it necessary to punish with death some individuals, these would be considered as suffering for the public good: and provided they deserved their doom, it would not be deemed an impeachment of his paternal love to his people. On the contrary, the prince, who under the plea of clemency should neglect to punish evil doers, and to protect his peaceable subjects, might indeed be the favourite of the fraudulent and rapacious, but his conduct would be reprobated by all honest men.

But as we are not capable of fully comprehending the plan of the divine government; and it would therefore be presumptuous to enter further upon such reasonings; let us turn our thoughts to another view of the subject.—The Lord hath shewn that he is love, in his dealings with sinful men, by his patience and providential bounty. Could we possibly witness all the crimes of every description, with all their aggravations, which are perpetrated in this city during a single day; could we see the malignity of every sin, and conceive of them all as committed against *us* by persons on whom we had conferred the greatest favours; and did we possess the unrestrained power of executing vengeance; I am persuaded that our patience would be wearied out before evening.—But the Lord at once sees all the sins committed in the whole world, together with the desperate wickedness of the human heart; he abhors with unalterable and infinite hatred every kind and degree of unholiness; he is able at any moment to punish sinners with irresistible vengeance; he could sustain no loss, if he destroyed all the workers of iniquity, and he might do it consistently with most perfect justice. Yet he bears with the rebellions of mankind from age to age; he endures the provocations of guilty lands, during the course of revolving centuries, while their presumptuous ingratitude continually increases; he prolongs the lives of individuals to fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years, while they defy his justice, ridicule his works and word, or persecute to death his inoffensive worshippers! This is a very affecting illustration of the subject, and a convincing proof that GOD is LOVE. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed;" and besides the value of a reprieve to a condemned criminal, many of us are under unspeakable obligations to the long-suffering of our God;

Digitized by Google

as he spared us during many years when we lived in unrepented sin, that he might at length make us partakers of his great salvation.

But, as if exemption from deserved misery were a small matter, the Lord confers on sinful men an exuberance of temporal comforts and benefits. From year to year he fills the earth with his riches: summer and winter, seed-time and harvest do not fail: things most necessary to the life of man are most plentifully bestowed; but the revolving seasons bring us a constant succession of valuable productions, to regale us with an agreeable variety of indulgence: and though we too commonly abuse this bounty to the dishonour of the Giver, every sense is liberally gratified with its proper object. The Lord holdeth our souls in life; his arm protects us, and his providence watches over us; while perhaps we proudly refuse to supplicate his favour, or ungratefully neglect to acknowledge his mercy. He defends us from sickness or heals our infirmities; he corrects with gentleness, and seems in haste to relieve our distresses: he sometimes shews us the danger, that our deliverance may be the more affecting; but more frequently he spares us the alarm, though he knows this will render us less attentive to his kindness. In these, and various similar instances, "the Lord is loving unto every man:" "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."

These are, however, subordinate proofs that GOD IS LOVE: and the apostle did not so much as stop to notice them; but with a beautiful abruptness hastened to select the grand illustration and demonstration of his doctrine: "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The Lord's purpose of pardoning sinners, and advancing them to a higher degree of glory and felicity, than that from which they had fallen, is not considered as the grand proof that God is love; though the knowledge of him and of ourselves will convince us, that it is too vast for our capacities, and exceeds all computation: but *the means* of our recovery and reconciliation are represented as exhibiting a still more astonishing illustration of the subject. Could the blessings designed us have been honourably conferred by an act of sovereignty, without the intervention of a mediator and an atoning sacrifice, as a prince pardons and then prefers a man who hath been guilty of treason; the obligation would have been immense. But it appears that this was impossible, because the Lord cannot act contrary to his own perfections. When therefore the honour of his law and justice seemed to place an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of pardoning mercy; when he could have glorified himself in the destruction of our rebellious race, and in creating worlds replenished with nobler inhabitants; that he should form and accomplish the plan of saving us by the incarnation and sufferings of his only begotten Son, was most stupendous mercy! That he should do this unsolicited by sinners; yea, while they continued to harden their hearts in daring rebellion against him! That he should both purpose the design of reconciling the world to himself by the interposition of a surety; and when the whole creation could not supply any being, whose dignity, excellency, love, and power were adequate to the arduous and gracious undertaking, that he should so love the world, as to give his only, his well-beloved Son, to assume the nature and become the brother of apostate man, that he might be his Redeemer, by a life of suffering obedience, and an agonizing death upon the cross! In this, says the apostle, is love! It is the grandest display, that ever was or ever will be made of God as Love! It exceeds and swallows up all the thoughts of men; and even of angels, who desire to look down into these things with unceasing admiration and rapturous delight!

Let it also be carefully observed, that the centre of these adorable wonders of divine mercy, is not fixed in the circumstance of Christ, as *incarnate*,

Digitized by Google

dying on the cross for sinners; but in the *incarnation* of the only begotten Son of God, that he might thus suffer and die for them!

We now therefore consider the Saviour as come into the world; his name, EMMANUEL, God with us; his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings accomplished. We next contemplate him rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, and in our nature appearing in the presence of God for us, as our High Priest and Advocate; exalted to the mediatorial throne, reigning over all creatures, and possessed of all power and fulness, for the salvation of every sinner who comes to God by him.

Had men known their real situation and character; and had it been intimated, that reconciliation to God, recovery to holiness, and admission to everlasting felicity might *possibly be attained*, by journeying to some remote inhospitable region, and performing certain arduous conditions: none would have acted *reasonably*, who hesitated to go in search of this invaluable advantage. In such a concern, all other pursuits ought to be relinquished or suspended, and every danger or hardship disregarded: no delay should be admitted, but all ought immediately to set out for the appointed place; and communicate the interesting report to others, till it had spread through the whole earth, as the most rejoicing tidings which ever reached the ears of sinful man.

But the Lord knew that we were not thus *reasonable*; but wholly indisposed to regard distant rumours, or to make convenient inquiries, about salvation. He therefore, according to the purposes of his boundless love, appointed a number of reconciled sinners to execute the ministry of reconciliation, by going abroad into the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. He invested them with miraculous powers, and inspired them with holy affections; he prepared them for patient sufferings and unwearied labours, and sent them with the glad tidings of his grace to sinners of every description, language, or climate. He ordered them not only to state and confirm the truths of Christianity; but to warn, invite, persuade, expostulate, and beseech sinners in his name to be reconciled to God. In this embassy, the vilest blasphemer, oppressor, murderer, and persecutor is included: not even the hoary-headed profligate is excepted! All things are ready: all men every where are commanded to repent, and invited to believe in the Son of God: nor is it possible that a sinner can want any thing, which is not promised to all who seek it by earnest prayer.

Miraculous powers have indeed long since been withdrawn; but the same ministry of reconciliation is continued: nor does any thing at this day so much prevent the gospel from spreading throughout the earth, as the disinclination to receive it which is universally manifested. Every heart is closed against the divine message, by self-flattering prejudices and carnal affections; men of all nations and orders unite in opposing its admission among them; and the events, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, have in this respect taken place, again and again, as often as the unadulterated gospel of Christ has been sent to those parts of the world, which were before unacquainted with it.

This may suggest a proper answer to the objections of infidels against revelation, on the ground of its not having been universally vouchsafed. The Lord indeed is not bound to vouchsafe unmerited benefits to all, or any of his creatures: "May he not do what he will with his own?" The objection therefore is replete with blind presumption. Yet it may also be observed, that ministers are commissioned and instructed, to use their utmost endeavours, that the knowledge of the gospel may be rendered universal; and that numbers have been, and still are, ready, at any personal risk, to attempt it: but the lusts of men raise such barriers against them, as nothing but Omnipotence can surmount or remove. Even in this *Christian* land, the genuine religion of the Bible scarcely ever finds admission into any place, but in the midst of opposition, contempt, and reproach: and no man should attempt to preach it, without standing prepared for degradation of charac-

Digitized by Google

ter, or exclusion from preferments which he might otherwise have expected. Many sincere friends to the truth are so influenced by this consideration, that they bring forward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel with a sparing and cautious hand, in hopes to insinuate them almost imperceptibly: and few of those who now glory in the cross of Christ, will deny, that once their hearts rose in aversion against that humiliating subject.

Yet still, our God, who is love, perseveres in sending his message to sinners, even forcing it upon their attention, and requiring his ministers to venture their scorn and resentment by their intrusions and importunity! And at last, when the carnal heart still persists in rejecting the gracious proposal, "of his great love wherewith he loved them, even when they were dead in sin, he quickens them by his grace; and makes them willing in the day of his power."

When therefore we affirm that GOD IS LOVE, we may apply it, to the love of the Father in giving his only Son to become our Saviour; to the love of the Son, in assuming our nature, coming into this sinful world, and dying on the cross for our sins, that he might be our all-prevailing Advocate; and to the love of the Spirit, in regenerating, sanctifying and comforting our hearts: that so "glory may be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end: Amen."

It would lead us too far to expatiate on the various instances of the Lord's unspeakable love to his believing people; his condescending regard to their minutest concerns; his tender sympathy with them in all their trials; his readiness to forgive even their renewed offences, and restore to them the joy of his salvation; his providential care, in restraining their enemies, moderating their temptations, supplying their wants, and answering their prayers; his kind acceptance of their feeble services; the consolations he affords them, especially in trouble; and his marvellous interposition in rendering their sufferings most efficacious medicines, and the king of terrors a messenger of peace. These and many other topics might be enlarged on, to illustrate the proposition that GOD IS LOVE. But we must,

III. Proceed to mention some perverse inferences which are frequently made from the text. 'If GOD BE LOVE,' say some men, 'may we not conclude that he will not make his creatures miserable?' Now this strange inference not only contradicts the general tenor of Scripture, the divine revelation of which it supposes; but it is refuted by undeniable facts: for most certainly sinful creatures do suffer many and great miseries. Not to mention the instances recorded in the sacred volume, concerning the Lord's dealings with fallen angels and sinful men; can we live in the world, and not both witness and feel the effects of the divine displeasure against transgressors? Are not whole cities and nations desolated by the scourge of war; or by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? Do not various diseases continually sweep immense multitudes into the grave, after enduring most excruciating pains? Are not the survivors bereaved of their choicest comforts, and penetrated with exquisite anguish? Is not the earth, in every part, filled with sighs, tears, groans, and bitter complaints? And are not all these afflictions the appointment of God, as punishments of sin, comprised in the first sentence denounced on fallen man,—"in sorrow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life,—till thou return to the ground:—for dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return?" Gen. iii. 16—19.

These sufferings are indeed turned into blessings to believers, and they are often useful in bringing sinners to repentance: but in themselves they are miseries, and frequently arise by natural consequence from men's vices; —so that it is most evident, that God doth punish sin with great severity. Hence we may learn, that we cannot judge concerning his conduct, from our own duty in apparently similar cases. In our private capacity, we ought not to inflict misery, or withhold relief when we are able to afford it, on ac-

Digitized by Google

count of any provocations whatever: but the duty of magistrates, in respect of malefactors, much more resembles the case under consideration. We should however frame to ourselves the most deplorable scenes imaginable; and then inquire, whether a benevolent man would not have prevented or relieved such miseries, if it had been in his power? And the answer to this inquiry must convince every one, who does not deny the superintending providence of God, or blaspheme his name, that we are incompetent judges on such subjects.

Yet many, who will not argue against these conclusions, would infer from the text, that God will not make any of his creatures finally and eternally miserable. But the deduction ought to be this: "GOD IS LOVE; 'therefore he will not cause any creature to suffer, unless some wise, holy, and benevolent purpose can be answered by its sufferings.' It would not consist with infinite love to give one moment's *needless* uneasiness; and it may consist with infinite love to make sinners eternally miserable; if the glory of God, and the interests of the universe through eternal ages, render it indispensibly necessary. Facts demonstrate, to all who allow God to be infinite in justice and goodness, that durable sufferings may be inflicted consistentiy with those perfections. Complicated and long continued miseries are very common; and death, the most dreaded of all temporal evils, cannot possibly be avoided. This seems to bring matters to extremities: for if the greatest punishment, which God hath threatened to inflict on sinners in this world, never fails to be executed; who can prove, or even probably conjecture, that the Lord will not accomplish his most tremendous denunciations of eternal misery? He is TRUTH as well as LOVE: and will any man seriously attempt to exalt his love by denying his Truth? He hath said, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven—in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction;" for "they shall go away into everlasting punishment." Matt. xxv. 46. 2 Thess. i. 8. And surely "God is not a man that he should lie!—hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numb. xxiii. 19.

The grandest display of the love of God doth equally declare his justice and holiness: and will not men allow that he is love, unless he will, as it were, abdicate his throne, dishonour his name, and neglect the interests of his obedient subjects, in order to preserve impenitent rebels from deserved punishment? These reflections ought rather to convince us, that there is a malignity in sin, of which men are not aware; seeing God, who is love, so terribly threatens, and severely punishes his offended creatures, and yet rescues a penitent remnant in so stupendous a manner!

But some men will still contend that God will save all *sincere* persons, each in his own way; and support this anti-scriptural opinion by the words of our text.—Leaving at present the case of those, who never were favoured with the clear light of divine revelation: let it be observed, that if they who are fully informed, or might be, did they properly improve their advantages, will persist in neglecting the way of salvation revealed in the Scriptures, to depend on their moral virtues, rational schemes, or self-invented observances; if they treat the truth of God as a lie, and count that wisdom, which angels adore, to be foolishness; if they regard the stupendous love of God in giving his Son to be the Saviour of the world as needless; and then pretend that he will condemn no man for unavoidable errors: let them look to it, for evil is before them. The whole Scripture declares such unbelief to be the offspring of pride, and the love of sin: and that such men continue under the unqualified sentence of final condemnation.

Sincerity is an ambiguous term: *sincerely* to hate infinite good and despise infinite excellency; and thus to be very *sincere* in fighting against God, and persecuting his saints, is surely very different from sincere repentance, faith in Christ, love of his people, and obedience to his commands. Yet men

Digitized by Google

either *artfully or ignorantly* confound these distinct ideas; and then pretend that *sincerity* is all that is necessary to salvation.

But this short specimen must suffice; though many more false inferences from the text might be mentioned; the wise man has, however, summed them all up in one verse: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." Eccles. viii. 11.

IV. Let us in the last place make some practical use of the subject.

The view of the unfathomable love of God, which hath been given, should increase men's abhorrence of sin, and dread of its consequences. The more glorious and excellent the Lord appears to be, the greater degree of odiousness must be contained in every transgression against him; and crimes committed under the clear light of the gospel, must on that account be peculiarly inexcusable. While therefore sinners should take warning to flee from the wrath to come, (for how will "they escape if they neglect so great salvation," and harden themselves in disobedience, because our God is merciful?) it is incumbent on us all to humble ourselves more and more for all our numberless offences, as most hateful and unreasonable, because committed against infinite goodness and excellency.

On the other hand, the subject is most delightfully suited to encourage the poor trembling penitent, how many or heinous soever his sins may have been. Poor desponding soul, remember that GOD is LOVE. Consider what he hath done to make way for the honourable exercise of his mercy. There were two obstacles in the way of our felicity; namely, his justice, and our proud obstinacy. He hath removed the former by "not sparing his own Son," but giving him a sacrifice for our sins; and he overcomes the latter when he "gives us repentance to the acknowledging of his truth." If then thou dost now submit to his righteousness, confess thy sins, and apply for salvation according to his merciful invitations; thou mayest assuredly expect a gracious reception; for he who commended his love to his enemies, by giving his own Son to die for them, cannot reject the weeping contrite supplicant, who pleads the all-prevailing name of Jesus, in humble faith, and fervent desires of finding mercy and grace through him.

Here again we may learn the standard of true excellency. The most shining characters, which genius hath selected to immortalize, have commonly been illustriously mischievous; and the unqualified admiration with which they are often mentioned, exceedingly misleads inexperienced youth. But GOD is LOVE; and the more we resemble and imitate him in this endearing attribute, the greater real excellency we unquestionably possess. Let us then be "followers of God," and "walk in love," after his pattern, in all the various displays of it which have been considered: then we shall certainly be known and approved as his children, and found meet for the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom.

Finally, if we be conscious of having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel, let us receive the trials allotted us, as the wise and holy appointments of divine love; let us not judge of the Lord's dispensations by our feelings or reasonings, but by his holy word; and let us submit to his will, whatever he may withhold, take away, or inflict; assured that he manages all our concerns in that manner, which is most conducive to our eternal interests, and best suited to illustrate the riches of his paternal liberality.

Digitized by Google

SERMON V.

ON REPENTANCE.

ACTS, XXVI. 19, 20.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

THE propriety and address of the apostle Paul's speech before Agrippa, Festus, and that august assembly, in whose presence he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, have been generally admired: but the faithfulness and courage, with which he pleaded the cause of the gospel, are perhaps still more deserving of our attention. He paid no court to his illustrious auditors; he attempted not to ingratiate himself with them, or even to shun their contempt or aversion: while he used the most effectual means of convincing them, not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in him was absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all men without exception ought to "repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Having given a brief narration of his own miraculous conversion; he produced his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles:—"I have appeared unto thee," says the divine Saviour, "to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people and the Gentiles, to whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon," says the apostle, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but shewed," first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." He did not think that in doing thus, "he was disobedient to the heavenly vision:" whence we may assuredly conclude, that in his view of Christianity, these practical subjects entirely consisted with the doctrines of faith and grace, with which his epistles abound. The several Christian graces may, and should be *distinguished*, as they have their appropriate nature and use: but they cannot be *separated* in the person who possesses them. For instance, an impenitent believer, and an unbelieving penitent are ideal characters: true faith is a penitent faith, and true repentance is believing repentance: yet the nature and use of repentance and faith should plainly be distinguished. This will appear more evidently, while from the text we take occasion to consider,

I. The importance of the subject, as it appears from the Scriptures.
II. Certain things which are implied in it.
III. The peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.
IV. And lastly, The works meet for repentance.

I. Let me call your attention, my brethren, to the importance, or prominence of this subject, as it appears from the Scriptures, especially from the New Testament.

Digitized by Google

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord when he came in human nature among his ancient people the Jews: but how did he execute his important office? He came preaching, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let me entreat your serious attention to this circumstance:—notwithstanding the advantages of that favoured nation, with all their notions and forms of godliness; there was no order of men, no religious sect, no individual whatever, that did not want repentance, as a preparation for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his spiritual kingdom. Insomuch, that the Baptist said to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father." Matt. iii. 7—10. Not long after, our Lord himself condescended to preach the gospel; and he too said, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When the apostles went forth at his command, they "preached every where that men should repent:" and it appears from part of his discourse to the seventy disciples, that they were charged with the same commission; for he said on that occasion, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in thee, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." Luke, x. 10—14.

Does our Lord say in one place, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost?" He elsewhere explains it, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Does the good Shepherd rejoice and call his friends to rejoice with him, when he has brought home the lost sheep? "So likewise is there joy in heaven," even "among the angels of God," "over one sinner that repenteth:" and when the prodigal, returning to his father, was graciously welcomed, all the family was called on to rejoice; "for this, my son, was lost and is found, was dead and is alive."

On the other hand, Christ "*upbraided* the cities, in which his mighty works had been done, because they repented not." He told the people, "that the men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment with that generation and condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas: and behold a greater than Jonas is here." He warned the Jews, that "except they repented, they would all likewise perish." And he summed up the reasons of his gentleness to notorious sinners, and his severity in rebuking the Pharisees, in this remarkable passage:—"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go to work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, *repented* not afterwards, that *ye might believe him!*" Matt. xxi, 28—32.

When our Lord was risen from the dead, and about to ascend unto the Father, he said to his apostles on one occasion, "Go ye, preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: and he that believeth not shall be damned." At another time he instructed them in this manner. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Mark xvi. 15, 16. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. We may know how the apostles understood their Lord, after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, if we attend to Peter, on the day of Pentecost, thus addressing the convinced Jews, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins:" and afterwards, "Repent and be converted, *that*

Digitized by Google

your sins may be blotted out; not *because your sins are blotted out;* as some modern systems seem to require: and why should men alter the order of Scriptural exhortations, unless they mean to change or confuse the doctrine of Scripture? Acts ii. 38. iii. 13.

When Peter related the circumstances of Cornelius's conversion to his brethren at Jerusalem, they made this remark, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Acts xi. 18. When Paul at Athens, before the celebrated council of Areopagus, boldly exposed the ignorance of this renowned seat of pagan philosophy, he said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth *all men every where* to repent." Acts xvii. 30. And stating the substance of his preaching before the elders of Ephesus, he thus expressed himself, "Testifying, both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xx. 21.

The same apostle, addressing the unbelieving Jews, thus expostulates with them, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance; But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath?" Rom. iii. 4, 5. To the Corinthians he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." And he expressed his fears, that when he came among them he should lament many, which had sinned and had not repented." 2 Cor. vii. 10. xii. 21. When he described the case of those who had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, he says, "It is impossible to renew them to repentance;" and on the other hand he directed Timothy, "In meekness to instruct those that opposed themselves, if peradventure God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Where it is particularly to be remarked, that *repentance* is considered as an essential preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, in order that they may "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who have been taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. Heb. vi. 6. And this agrees with Peter's advice to Simon Magus, "Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Acts viii. 22.

The testimonies already produced may probably be deemed more than sufficient for the purpose: but let every one remember, that we are not only concerned to prove the truth of the doctrine: it is also requisite to shew that the experience and exercise of repentance are indispensably necessary to salvation; and that this hath been a matter of the last importance in religion under every dispensation. I shall however only select one passage from the Old Testament, with which to conclude this part of our subject. "I will judge you, every one according to your ways, saith the Lord God; repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; therefore repent, and turn ye." Ezek. xviii. 30—32. Let us then consider,

II. Certain things, which are implied in the language of the text, "That men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

It is evidently implied in these words, that all men have sinned. God would never require any one to repent, who had never offended: yet "he commands all men every where to repent." Sin is the transgression of the divine law, either by omission or commission, by defect or redundance, in thought, word, or deed. Few indeed of the human race are acquainted with the full extent and spirituality of this perfect rule: yet all know more than they practise. Every man's conscience therefore must testify, if he allow himself time for reflection, that he hath often wilfully neglected his known duty, and acted contrary to the conviction of his own mind, for the sake of

Digitized by Google

some idolized worldly object. And this alone proves, that he ought to repent and turn to God, from whom he hath in this manner inexcusably departed.

But "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and not merely against a few scandalous and enormous crimes. Many painful effects of the divine displeasure are experienced during the present life, which universally terminate in death: then the sinner's "body returns to the dust whence it was taken, and the soul returns to God that gave it." Criminals suffer many things previous to their trial; but the principal punishment is subsequent to condemnation: thus "it is appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment:" and we are "warned to flee from the wrath *to come*;" from which Jesus delivers his people; who must suffer and die like other men. The connection therefore between sin and future condemnation to everlasting punishment, which cannot be escaped without repentance, is clearly implied in the language of the text.

Nor should we forget, that this condemnation is *merited*; for unless sin deserves the punishment denounced, there can be no free mercy in remitting it. When the apostles were sentenced to stripes or death, for preaching the gospel, they might lament the injustice of the magistrates, but they could not repent of their own conduct in "obeying God rather than men." Such persons, as deem the laws of any country iniquitous, and their governor's oppressive, will complain when they suffer for disobedience; but they cannot *repent*, unless they be convinced of criminality in themselves. Nor can any man repent of breaking the law, and falling under the condemnation of God, unless he allow that he deserves the threatened punishment. It would carry us too far, to prove or illustrate the justice of God in the sentence pronounced against transgressors, by stating the rebellion, ingratitude, and enmity, which more or less connect with all our violations of the divine law; but surely, if crimes against our fellow-creatures may deserve death, sins against our infinitely glorious Creator merit a punishment proportionably more dreadful. It is not commonly supposed that malefactors are sufficiently impartial, even if in other respects competent, to decide on the equity of the laws, or to amend the criminal code. It becomes us therefore, rather to submit to the justice of God, and to supplicate his mercy, than to reply against him, as if we would condemn that we may be justified.

The text implies likewise, that all have turned away from God. The characters of men are greatly diversified, but all "have forsaken the fountain of living waters, to hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water." Apostacy from God, or a refusal to render him the worship, love, gratitude, and obedience which he demands; alienation of heart from him, and a disposition to seek happiness any where, rather than in his favour and service, are universal. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." All men are become idolaters; they desire and delight supremely in the creature, in one form or other; while a self-sufficient independent spirit, a proneness to self-admiration, and to seek their own will or glory as the ultimate end of all their actions, constitutes another kind of universal idolatry. Hence the necessity of repenting and turning to God, as the supreme object of our love, and the source of our felicity.

But we must also observe, that the text contains an intimation of mercy, and of the way the Lord hath opened, in which the returning sinner may approach him, with full confidence of a gracious reception. If there were any one, who had so grievously offended, that no forgiveness would be vouchsafed him, even if he did most sincerely and penitently seek it; God would never command that man to repent, and turn to him. When a company of malefactors have been convicted on the clearest evidence of the most atrocious crimes; a command from their prince to own their guilt, and apply for mercy in a prescribed way, would be considered as an encouragement to expect a pardon. A hope would spring up in every breast; and if any, who

Digitized by Google

had unreservedly complied with this injunction, should at last be led to execution, they would think themselves trifled with; however just their punishment might otherwise be. Now the Lord hath revealed himself as infinitely merciful to the fallen race of men; he hath opened a new and living way, for our approach to him upon a throne of grace; he hath invited us to draw near, and plead the name of our heavenly Advocate, and the merits of his atoning sacrifice; he hath commanded all men every where to repent; and from these things we confidently infer, that every one, without exception, who 'through grace obeys the call,' will be saved, by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In short, if any man were sinless, and had no need of repentance, or if any were so sinful that repentance would avail him nothing; the general language of the text would not be suited to the case: but as all have sinned, and "with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption;" as no impenitent sinner can be saved, and no true penitent can be lost; therefore all men are exhorted and commanded to "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

III. Then we proceed to consider the peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

The parable of the prodigal son was intended as an illustration of this important subject: and we cannot more advantageously introduce the subsequent discussion, than by adverting to the remarkable expression, which our Lord made use of on that occasion. "*When he came to himself*, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" He had been infatuated, he had acted as one in a delirium, or insane; but now the disorder is removed, he awakes as out of sleep, recovers the use of his faculties, and perceives his misery and danger. He now sees every object in a new light; he forms a very different judgement of his father's conduct, and the rules and privileges of his family: of his own perverse behaviour, of his associates in vice; and in short of every thing connected with his character, situation, and prospects. From this revolution in his judgment, a total alteration takes place in his conduct. He considers the meanest servant of his father as comparatively happy, and himself as a wretched outcast deservedly perishing. His only hope in this extreme distress arises from a persuasion of the tender compassion of his father, whom before he had regarded as an enemy to his happiness: and he determines at all events to return to him, and seek to be reconciled on any terms, as his only refuge from destruction.

In like manner the sinner, having long thought the Lord a hard master, and religion a wearisome service; and in vain sought liberty and pleasure in sin and folly; at length by the rich mercy of God is brought to himself, recovers from his delirium or fascination, to see his misery, and lament his madness. Now he perceives, that the Lord is worthy of all love, obedience, and adoration; that his law is holy, just, and good; that his service is perfect freedom, and his favour, life and felicity; and that sin is but another name for folly, bondage, and ruin. He is convinced, that the poorest believer is far happier than the most prosperous sinner; that his past conduct calls for the deepest humiliation, that his present situation is perilous in the extreme, and that his only refuge is in the compassion of that God, against whom he hath so ungratefully rebelled. Influenced by such considerations, he arises from his grovelling indulgences and low pursuits; he repents and turns to God, with humble confessions and fervent prayers; he struggles through difficulties, resists temptations, and rises above dark, desponding fears; and finds our heavenly Father far more ready to pardon, welcome, and bless him, than he could possibly have expected.

Yes, my brethren, many of you know the meaning of this parable by your own happy experience: and comparing the bitterness of your sinful courses, with the peace and joy which you have found in believing; you are ready to say to others, "Come, taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed

Digitized by Google

they are that trust in him."—But are there not also among you some persons who never thus "came to themselves?" and have no acquaintance with the change that hath been described?—A few instances may indeed occur, where repentance and conversion have begun so early in life, and been matured so gradually, as to leave no distinct traces of this experience: but they who are strangers to these things, are commonly ignorant of vital Christianity and its saving efficacy. True converts, however imperceptible their progress may have been, are always conscious of desires and dispositions, which are not natural to fallen man; and they are more prone to question, whether a change, wrought quietly and gradually, can be genuine, than to suppose a more distinct awakening to a new sense of guilt and danger, to be in general unnecessary.

This "coming to ourselves" is often attended with alarm and terror; (which, however, are not at all essential to true repentance:) and it is always productive of godly sorrow, a deep and unfeigned concern for having offended our great and glorious Creator, broken his good laws, acted so foolish and base a part, and done so much injury to our neighbours and relatives. This is likewise connected with self-abasement, lowly thoughts of ourselves, and a disposition to plead guilty before God, and confess our sins unreservedly, with shame and remorse. Thus the Lord speaks of penitent Ephraim by his holy prophet. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Jer. xxxi. 18—20. The effects of repentance are described after a similar manner in Ezekiel: "That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more for thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Ezek. xvi. 63. For "he looketh upon men, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not, he shall deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light." Job xxxiii. 27, 28. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." The returning prodigal makes no excuse for his conduct, but says, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And "the publican, who smote on his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner, went home justified," rather than the Pharisee that despised him.

While men continue to boast, to palliate their conduct, to throw the blame on others, or to attempt making amends for their sins, they are not truly penitent: but when their excuses are silenced, and they condemn themselves without reserve, they begin to shew a temper of mind suited to their situation and character. And never was food more grateful to one perishing with hunger, or liberty more welcome to the poor prisoner, than the gospel of Christ is to every such broken-hearted penitent. He may be exercised with doubts of its truth, or entertain confused notions of its freeness and sufficiency; but as the grand obstacle to believing is removed, this preparation of heart will make way for the fuller illumination and conviction of his understanding; and he will soon most cordially approve and embrace the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ.

For the true penitent abhors and detests his sins; he despises and rejects the wages and pleasures of iniquity; he casts away with loathing all his transgressions, and dreads a relapse into them as the most dire calamity. The gospel therefore entirely coincides with his views, desires, and wants: he renounces all other hopes of salvation, along with his former pursuits and connections, that he may seek liberty and happiness in the favour and service of his reconciled God. His former alienation is removed; he returns to him as his rest and refuge; and through many conflicts and discourage-

Digitized by Google

ments, he comes to God, to yield himself to his service, to become his spiritual worshipper, and "as bought with a price to glorify him, in body and in spirit which are his."

In this manner all men ought to "repent and turn to God," from their worldly idols, and sinful pursuits: and do you not find, my friends, that in keeping at a distance from the fountain of living waters, you prolong your own distress and disappointment? Do none of you, while striving against conviction, or cleaving to your lusts and pleasures, and refusing to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, experience such disquietude as the Psalmist has described; "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought in summer." Psalm xxxii. 3, 4. Why should you then pertinaciously refuse to hearken to the voice of Christ, and the admonitions of your own consciences? Why refuse to draw near to God, that he may draw near unto you? Do you not sometimes feel, though unwilling to own it, that the warnings and counsels of your ministers are reasonable, and that it would be your highest interest to comply with them? Are you not ready to say, "Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee?" But why do you delay to apply for relief, and embrace happiness? Have you not found the world to be vain and vexatious; and the pleasures of sin bitter and painful? Have not all endeavours to establish your own righteousness, or overcome your own passions, habits, and temptations, proved wearisome and unsuccessful? Hear then the words of the sinner's friend, while he speaks to you in accents of the tenderest love. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live." "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah lv. Confess your sin, therefore, without reserve; forsake them without delay, renounce your former associates in ungodliness: Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." James iv. 6—10. Make no more vain excuses, pretend not that your sins have been few or small; be not afraid to view them in their full magnitude and malignity; but trust only in the mercy of the Father, the atoning blood and prevailing mediation of the Son, and the powerful grace of the Holy Spirit; return to the Lord with weeping and supplications; and speedily your sorrows shall be turned into joy, and your heaviness into glad songs of grateful praise.

But it is not only our duty to preach, "that men should repent and turn to God;" we must also call on them to do works meet for repentance; and this leads us,

IV. To consider what is meant by this clause of the text.

If a man truly repent of any misconduct, which hath proved injurious to himself or others, he would be glad, were it possible, to undo those actions, which he recollects with shame and remorse. This is indeed impracticable; yet frequently the effects may be prevented or counteracted; which is a work meet for repentance, especially if it be done with much loss and self-denial. This consideration may suggest a powerful inducement to early piety; for even if the sinner should be spared, and live to repent in his

Digitized by Google

riper years, he will seldom be able to prevent the mischievous effects of his youthful iniquities; and that which is practicable and indispensible, will resemble "the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye."

The man, who has in any way defrauded others, cannot be thought "to do works meet for repentance," unless he make restitution to the best of his ability and recollection, whatever mortifying or self-denying circumstances attend it: for without this, *he retains the wages of his crimes, and perpetuates his injustice.* But as one vice often wastes the gains of another, restitution may be absolutely impracticable; and in many cases it is almost impossible to know to whom restitution should be made, even if a man is able and willing to make it. When therefore the apostle says, "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth;" Eph. iv. 28. he seems to counsel such persons to submit to hard labour and mean fare, that by giving to the poor, they might make such restitution, as their circumstances allowed of: and this is certainly a work meet for repentance. Were this lowly, industrious, and self-denying conduct more common among professors of the gospel; they would more frequently be enabled to adorn the doctrine of Christ, by an unrequired restitution for wrongs, which the laws of men do not notice, but which a tender well-informed conscience cannot overlook. And when wrong has been done, and the individuals who have been injured cannot be exactly ascertained; the poor, especially of the families with which such men have dealt, should be considered as best entitled to the restitution. This, however, is certain, that the professed penitent himself, whether he have defrauded individuals or the public, cannot retain it, either as a treasure to hoard up, or as a source of indulgence; without putting an accursed thing among his own stuff, and becoming an accursed thing like unto it. Josh. vii.—But we may have traduced the characters, poisoned the principles, or corrupted the morals of others, or in various ways injured them, if we have not robbed them of their property; and though adequate restitution cannot be made; yet we should do all in our power to counteract the effects of our misconduct, and to promote the best interest of those we have harmed; if we would evidence the sincerity of our repentance and faith, and of our love to God and man.

He that well understands the gospel of Christ, and the nature of genuine repentance, will readily perceive, that forgiveness of injuries and love of enemies, are peculiarly required by the words of the text. The man who refuses to forgive, surely forgets his own need of forgiveness! and he, who will do nothing for the benefit of his enemies, can have no proper sense of his own sinfulness, and of the love of God in reconciling us when enemies by the death of his Son. The view, which the true penitent has of Christ, dying on the cross, and praying for his murderers, will render it easy to him, to pity and love his enemies, to do good to them that hate him, and pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him. These too are works meet for repentance, without which all tears, confessions, and even restitution can never prove it genuine and unfeigned.

Patience under afflictions, contentment in our situation, thankfulness for mercies, and meekness under provocations, might be separately considered, did time permit. But in general, an habitual walk in newness of life, comprises the whole. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." Watching and praying against the sins which once had most entire dominion over us: redeeming our time and improving our talents, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith; a circumspect conduct, and a constant attendance on the ordinances of God; a humble deportment in the family and community, as well as in the church; and a care to "exercise ourselves daily to have a conscience void of offence, towards God and man:" these I say are works meet for repentance.—When the people asked John Baptist, what they should do,

Digitized by Google

in compliance with his exhortation to this effect; he did not require them to retire into deserts, or immure themselves in cloisters, nor even to torment themselves with excessive austerities: but he recommended liberal charity, strict integrity, and a harmless and exemplary conduct even in the station of publicans and soldiers.

But these hints must suffice, as every reflecting person will be able to branch out the general rules laid down into a variety of particulars; and the grand use of preaching is to lead men to reflection.

Perhaps, however, I am addressing some persons, who still object to the subject; and confiding in the rectitude of their hearts, and the undeviating virtue of their conduct, deem the doctrine of repentance and conversion wholly foreign to their case. I have heard persons of this description gravely observe, that 'it would be much better to preach the necessity of a good life, than to dwell on repentance, except among the refuse of the species, of whom indeed little hope could be entertained.' But how can such men help seeing, that they only repeat the objections of the Pharisees against Christ himself, and exactly resemble these ancient opposers of the gospel. I would, however, at present only say: If any one of you had a son, whom you had tenderly treated from his birth, and who should yet act with as much disregard to your counsel and authority, as you have done to those of your Creator, would you not think that he ought to repent of his ungrateful behaviour? And have *you* then no cause for repentance? Verily whatever you may think, it will hereafter appear, that there "is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine such just persons that need no repentance."

But does any one say, 'I own in general that I ought to repent; yet I find a strange insensibility of conscience, backwardness to humble myself before God, or to renounce the pleasures of sin, and a grievous propensity to delay the necessary business, till my alarms and convictions vanish without any abiding effect.' To you, my friend, I would observe that repentance is the gift of God; and that Jesus is exalted "to give repentance and remission of sins." Pray therefore to the Lord to give you repentance and his Holy Spirit: cry in the language of Ephraim, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned;" and beg of him to take away the heart of stone, and to give the heart of flesh. Meditate also continually on the sufferings of Christ,—the dignity of the sufferer, and the exhibition God hath given us, in that great transaction, both of his holy hatred of sin, and his compassionate love of sinners. This is the most effectual cure for a hard heart, and an unfeeling conscience. "I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look on me whom they have pierced and mourn." Zech. xii. 10.

But remember that life is uncertain; God, whom thou provokest, especially by impenitence, is the arbiter of thy life and death. "The Holy Ghost saith, To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Even if your days should be prolonged, you may be given over to final obduracy, and continuance in sin will be sure to increase the anguish of repentance, should you at last, by a miracle of mercy, be plucked as a brand out of the burning.

Above all, my fellow-sinners, beware lest you be deceived with a false repentance, for nothing so effectually hardens men in impenitence. Some transient convictions, fears, and sorrows, some partial reformation; a new creed, sect, or form of religion; enthusiastic joys and comforts, or delusive fancies of visions and revelations, frequently satisfy men's consciences, and fill them with spiritual pride, while their hearts remain unchanged, the root of sin unmortified, and no works are found meet for repentance! Beware also of the partial despairing repentance of Judas, the temporary repentance of king Saul, the extorted repentance of Pharaoh, and the case of him who was almost persuaded to be a Christian.—Nor let it be imagined, that repentance and conversion to God are confined to the beginning of a religious profession: for as long as we continue sinful, and prone to depart from the

Digitized by Google

Lord, they must constitute our habitual practice, form the dispositions of our hearts, and influence all our tempers, and our conduct.

On the other hand, let not the contrite mourner for sin despond: remember, poor trembling penitent, that "there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Yea, the Lord of angels, "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied." Only then beseech the Lord, that your repentance may be genuine, and your conversión entire; thus you will surely find the Lord ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy; and ere long you will joyfully sing, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away and thou comfortest me." "For they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "Let then the hearts of those rejoice that seek the Lord."

Finally, my Christian brethren, while you are careful in other respects to do works meet for repentance; let me exhort you to enter into the spirit of the gospel, by using every means, and encouraging every endeavour, to bring sinners to repentance; and to welcome every penitent with cordial joy and affection, as Ananias did the converted persecutor, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight." Thus you will manifest the excellency of your principles, and be honoured as instruments in promoting that cause, for which the divine Saviour came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross; and all men will know that you are his true disciples.

SERMON VI.

ON REGENERATION.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

THE circumstances of the church at Corinth obliged the apostle to use such methods of re-establishing his authority, as he apprehended might be misunderstood and censured; he therefore says, "whether we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be sober it is for your cause." The zealous servants of God have constantly been slighted and despised, as beside themselves; nay, the Son of God, the perfection of wisdom and excellency, was involved in the same charge, even by his friends and relations, as well as by his enemies. 2 Kings ix. 11. Jer. xxix. 26, 27. Hos. ix. 7. Mark iii. 21. John x. 20. The apostle therefore had no great cause to complain, if not only Festus said, "Paul thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad," but if some of his Corinthian converts formed a similar judgment of him. Surely then we ought not to be disconcerted by such surmises, provided we give no just cause for them: and all, who attend to the Scriptures, should be very careful, lest aspersions of this kind prejudice them against the ministers and disciples of Christ.

'But,' says the apostle, 'both the ardour that gives occasion to such imputations, and the wisdom which regulates its effects, spring from regard to the glory of God, and affectionate longing after your souls:' "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose

Digitized by Google

again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea though we have known Christ after the flesh; yet now henceforth know we him no more." No ties of blood, friendship, or gratitude, must influence the conduct of the minister of Christ, to render him partial in his pastoral office. Even the brethren, or nearest friends of Christ himself, according to the flesh, might not be regarded by the apostles, in dispensing instructions, reproofs, censures, or encouragements; but they were required, and constrained by spiritual love to him who had died for them, to do all things with unbiassed impartiality. And this must be our conduct likewise in respect of our relations, benefactors, or patrons, if we would approve ourselves to be indeed their genuine successors in the sacred ministry. "Therefore," says the apostle, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new: and all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."

The text contains the following subjects for our present discussion.

I. The apostle's definition or description of a real Christian; "If any man be *in Christ*."

II. His account of that inward change, which every real Christian has experienced, "He is a new creature."

III. The effects of this change, "Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."

I. Then we consider the apostle's definition or description of a real Christian, "If any man be *in Christ*."

However strange this expression may seem to many who are now called Christians, it is the uniform language of the Scripture, especially of the New Testament: and whenever any set of men seem earnest to change the language of inspiration, we may be sure that they either mistake its meaning, or have some concealed objection to its doctrines. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." New terms will imperceptibly introduce new doctrines; nor has any subtlety of Satan or his servants better succeeded, in "privily bringing in damnable heresies," than that of modernizing the language of divinity.

The words under consideration commonly signify a true disciple of our Lord and Saviour. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*." "I knew a man *in Christ* fourteen years ago." "He was also *in Christ* before me." "Of whom are ye *in Christ Jesus*, who of God is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Rom. viii. 1. xvi. 7. 1 Cor. i. 30. And in this chapter, "That we might be made the righteousness of God *in him*." Many of the epistles also are addressed "to the saints *in Christ Jesus*," or "to the church—in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."—Which accords to the language of the prophet, "Israel shall be saved *in the Lord* with an everlasting salvation." "Surely, shall one say, *In the Lord* have I righteousness and strength." "*In the Lord* shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." 2 Cor. xii. 2. Isaiah xlv. 17, 24, 25.

The apostle John also employs similar expressions; "And now, little children, abide *in him*." "We are *in him* that is true, even *in his Son Jesus Christ*." 1 John ii. 28. v. 20. But the words of our Lord himself are most decisive; "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth *in me* and I in him." John vi. 56. Accordingly, when we administer the Lord's Supper, that outward sign of this inward life of faith in a crucified Saviour, we pray 'that we may so eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood;—that we may dwell in him and he in us.'—"Neither," saith our divine Redeemer, when interceding for his disciples, "pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." John xvii. 20—23.

Digitized by Google

But we must endeavour to explain this language and to shew its propriety and energy; lest it should be thought, that the whole argument rests upon our translation of the original particles. St Paul says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life *through*," or *in* "Christ Jesus our Lord:" for John says, "This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Rom. vi. 23. 1 John v. 11, 12. The salvation of Christ is completed, as far as his mediatory work is concerned: but who are they that shall eventually be "saved from wrath by him?" To this question the Scripture answers with the most decided precision; "they that receive him," "they that believe in him," "they that are found *in him*."—Union with Christ is necessary in order to communion with him: he saves all those, and those only, who thus stand related to him. True faith forms this union and relation, and makes the sinner a partaker of Christ and his salvation.

According to the illustrations of Scripture, the believer is *in Christ*, as the stone is in the building. God is preparing a spiritual temple, in which he may dwell and be glorified for ever. The person of Christ is the precious foundation and corner stone of this temple, and believers "come to him and as living stones are built up a spiritual house," "an habitation of God through the Spirit." 1 Peter ii. 4—8. Eph. ii. 20—22. But this emblem, taken from things wholly inanimate, only represents our dependence on Christ and consecration to God through him: we therefore learn more fully the nature of this mystical union, by the parable of the vine and its branches. Nominal Christians, who are related to the Saviour merely in an external manner, continue unfruitful; and at length are taken away, withered, and gathered to be burned: but true believers are vitally united to him, and abiding in him receive the fructifying influences of the Holy Spirit. John xv. 1—8. Yet even this illustration falls short of fully elucidating the subject; nay, the nearest of all relative unions does not entirely answer to it: for believers are *in Christ*, as the members are in the human body. He is the Head of the church, and every Christian is a part of his mystical body, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. All believers live spiritually by virtue of this union with their Head; they are placed under his guidance and authority; have one common interest, and fill up their stations in the church for the benefit of the whole. 1 Cor. xii. 12—31. Thus says the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."—"Your Life, is hid with Christ in God; when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 3, 4.

There is, however, another way of illustrating the subject, which may help us to conceive aright of this great mystery, Eph. v. 32. and explain the way in which a sinner attains to so high an honour, and so blessed a distinction. The believer is *in Christ*, as Noah was in the ark. "By faith Noah being warned of God was moved with fear, and prepared an ark." Heb. xi. 7. 1 Peter iii. 20. He believed the sure testimony of God, both respecting the deluge, and the appointed method of preservation; he feared the impending judgment, and revered the justice and power of God; and thus he was moved to follow the directions he had received. To prepare the ark was a vast undertaking; his labour and expence must have been exceedingly great, and his perseverance, amidst the scorn and hatred of an unbelieving world, most exemplary.—But when the deluge came, he was found in the ark, and preserved to be the progenitor of a new race of men; and even of the promised Redeemer, on whom doubtless his faith had ultimately been placed: while all the rest of the human species, however distinguished, or to whatever refuges they fled, were swept away with one common desolation. Thus the sinner, hearing of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," believing the divine record "is moved with fear," and takes warning to flee from the wrath to come.

Digitized by Google

He hears also of Christ, the true ark, which God himself hath provided; and renouncing all other confidences, by faith he betakes himself to this sure refuge, applies for admission into the ark, and endures the self-denial, contempt, and persecution to which this may expose him. And whatever difficulties he may now encounter; his wisdom will be acknowledged, and his felicity envied, when no unbeliever shall find any shelter from the overwhelming deluge of divine vengeance, which perhaps he now despises or blasphemes.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the *guiltless* man-slayer was exposed to the sword of the avenger of blood, the nearest relation of the deceased; but cities of refuge were provided, to which he might flee for security.—In this perilous situation an Israelite had no choice: he must scarcely turn back to take his clothes, and by no means go home to bid farewell to his dearest relatives: he must leave all his outward comforts, employments, and interests: he must flee without delay, and hardly stop for necessary refreshment: he must not yield to indolence, or sit down when weary; and could never think of loitering, to interfere with other men's business, to view curiosities, or to join in vain diversions. With all speed he must urge his course to the city of refuge; as if he had seen the avenger of blood with his drawn sword close behind, and heard him uttering most dreadful menaces. When he had gained the appointed asylum, he was required to abide there, at a distance from all his connections, those excepted who chose to follow him; and this restriction continued, till the death of the high-priest set him at liberty from his confinement.

In like manner, the sinner, perceiving himself exposed to the wrath of God, and the curse of his violated law, must "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him" in the gospel. Without delay he must diligently use all the means of grace, and separate from the vain pursuits and pleasures of an unbelieving world. He must not give "sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eye-lids; but flee as a bird from the snare of the fowler, and as a roe from the hand of the hunter." He must "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling," and earnestly apply to Christ for an interest in his atonement; knowing that if death should overtake him, before he be made a partaker of this blessing, the avenging justice of God will prove the ruin of his immortal soul. And when he hath obtained a good hope of his acceptance, he must still keep close to his refuge; renouncing the society of all those, that refuse to join with him in his new course of life: remembering that "if any man love father, or mother, wife or children, more than Christ, he cannot be his disciple."

Thus the true believer is *in Christ*, as in the city of refuge: and if we do not wish to deceive ourselves, we may know whether our experience, conduct, and confidence bear any resemblance to this representation; and whether we desire to join the apostle in saying, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord;—I count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found *in him*, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. iii. 8, 9.

He that is thus united unto the Lord Jesus is finally delivered from condemnation; all his sins are blotted out, and buried in the depths of the sea; "being justified by faith he hath peace with God;" to whom being reconciled when an enemy "by the death of his Son, he shall be saved by his life." He is admitted into a covenant of friendship with the everlasting God, and adopted into his family as a son and heir. "All things shall work together for his good," and "nothing shall separate him from the love of Christ." All the promises without exception belong to him, and shall be fulfilled in due season and order; "for," says the apostle, "all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."—We consider, then,

II. The apostle's account of that inward change, which every real Christian has experienced. "He is a new creature."

Digitized by Google

"If any man be in Christ," whether he were before a Jew or a Gentile; whether he were moral, civil, learned, ingenious, devout, zealous, or superstitious and enthusiastical, a sceptical reasoner, or a scoffing infidel; when he becomes a Christian, "he is a new creature."—"We are his workmanship, created *in Christ Jesus* unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." "For *in Christ Jesus* neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Gal. vi. 15. Eph. ii. 10. What are we then to understand by these energetic expressions?—Will any sensible man maintain, that a new creed or name may properly be called a new creation? Will he affirm that nothing more was meant, than a decent moral conduct, or an external reformation? Does this amount to any thing more, than the cleansing of the outside, while the heart remains full of polluting affections? And let it be remembered, that such frigid interpretations are merely the word of man; for "the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Jer. xxiii. 29. Heb. iv. 12.

It is, however, proper to observe, that he, who is a new creature, continues in many respects the same as before. His body, with all its members and senses, is the same; though he finds himself disposed to make a new use of them: his soul and all its faculties are the same, though his judgment, inclinations, and affections are entirely changed. He possesses his former measure of capacity and learning; with the peculiarity of his genius, and the original complexion of his mind. The man of enlarged powers does not lose that superiority of talent; while he is content to be thought a fool for Christ's sake, to seek wisdom from him with the teachableness of a little child, and to devote all his endowments to the glory of the Giver. The man of slender abilities and illiterate education makes no advances in learning or ingenuity, except as he becomes of "good understanding in the way of godliness." No alteration takes place in a person's relative situation or rank in society: he can claim no additional civil immunities or advancement, when he is in Christ a new creature: nor does he forfeit any of his rights; though persecution may deprive him of them, and love of Christ make him willing to renounce them.—In general he abides in his calling, if lawful; but endeavours to fill it up in a new manner.

What then is especially intended?—Here again the Scripture assists our inquiry by apt illustrations. "Ye were," says the apostle, "the servants of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, which was delivered you." Rom. vi. 17. Learned men generally agree, that the concluding words would be more exactly rendered, "*into which ye were delivered*;" alluding to the mould, into which melted metal is poured, that it may thence take its intended fashion and impression.—When vessels of silver have been thus formed again, they are as really *new*, as if the metal had just been brought from the mine. Thus sinners are in themselves, "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," bearing the image of fallen Adam, and disposed to imitate his rebellion and apostacy; but the new creation forms us into "vessels of mercy, prepared for glory," stamped with the image of Christ, fitted for our Master's use, and ready for every good work. We are the same men, yet new creatures.

The grafted tree also is in many respects the same as before: yet it is a new tree, and as the poet beautifully expresses it,

"Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma."

'It wonders at its new leaves, and fruit that is not its own.'—Thus when the word of truth is ingrafted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the same man becomes a new creature, and his thoughts, words, and actions also become new.

The Scriptural emblems of sinners, according to their different propensi-

Digitized by Google

ties, are taken from lions, tigers, foxes, swine, and serpents, and other fierce, crafty, ravenous, or filthy animals: but a sheep or a dove is the emblem of a Christian; and the new creation effects this marvellous change. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp; and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain." Isaiah xi. 6—9. Does not every man perceive, that if Almighty God should dispose these animals to live together in perfect amity, as here described, they would be *new creatures;* though the same outward form, and many other peculiarities of each species should remain? And who can deny, that if the grace of God so change the ambitious, rapacious, covetous, fraudulent, contentious, revengeful, cruel, sensual and profane, that they willingly live together, "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," they are to all religious purposes new creatures?

Let any considerate and impartial man compare the character and spirit of St Paul, before and after his conversion; and determine for himself whether the apostle was not a new creature. His body and soul, his abilities and ardent turn of mind continued the same; but in all other respects, he differed as much from his former self, as from any other man in the world. The change would probably appear as remarkable in the case of Matthew, Zaccheus, or Onesimus, had we as copious an account of them, as we have of the apostle.—Nay, the thief upon the cross gave evident proofs that the tree was made good; for the fruit began to be good, and would doubtless have been abundant, had his life been spared.—Even when a man's outward conduct has been irreproachable, the internal change in his views, purposes, and desires, is clearly manifest to his own mind, though the effects be less visible to others.

The various metaphors, in which this new creation is spoken of in Scripture, confirm the explanation that hath been given. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, saith the Lord." Ezek. xi. 19, 20. xxxvi. 25—27. But reformation, without an inward change of disposition, would be a mere counterfeit of the promised blessing.—"Ye must be born again." "Blessed be God who hath begotten us again to a lively hope." John iii. 1—8. 1 Peter. i. 3, 23. The allusion is made, in this common Scriptural language, to the production of a creature, which before had no separate existence, but now possesses life, has capacities of action and enjoyment, wants nourishment, and may be expected to grow up to maturity: and it is the invariable rule of nature, that the offspring bears the image, and inherits the propensities of the parent animal. The emphatical meaning of "being born again," "born of the Spirit," "born of God," must be very manifest: and had our Lord only intended an outward ordinance or reformation, when he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God;" it could not have been denied, that he had perplexed a plain subject by a needless obscurity of expression.

"You hath he quickened," saith the apostle, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." Man, as the Lord created him, possessed animal life and its propensities; as a rational creature, he was capable of actions and enjoyments of a higher order; and as *spiritual*, he was capable of finding happiness in the love and service of God: but he has lost his *spiritual* life by the fall, and is *dead in sin*. Fallen angels possess the powers of reason to a very great degree; yet they are *spiritually dead;* they are incapable of loving and enjoying God, and finding happiness in his holy service: and, I am persuaded that sober reflection will convince any candid inquirer, that the most rational man living, is, without regeneration, as incapable of the pleasures

Digitized by Google

angels enjoy in heaven, as animals are of sharing the satisfactions of the philosopher. This appears in one remarkable circumstance: when any person renounces all other pursuits for the sake of religion, it is always supposed that he leads a joyless life, and is in danger of becoming melancholy: as if the felicity of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, were wholly unsuited to man's nature on earth, and incapable of affording him delight!

The same internal renovation is called, "the circumcision of the heart to love the Lord;" and described under the image of "putting his law in the *heart*, and writing it in the *inward* parts." "For the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

This change is the beginning of that "renewing in the spirit of our mind," that "transformation by the renewing of our mind," which we read of in the apostolical epistles: "the putting off the old man," and "the putting on the new man," relate to the growth of the new creature, and the removal of every thing that retards it. Regeneration is the beginning of *sanctification*, which signifies the *making of that person or thing holy, which was before unholy*. So that, while it is an undoubted truth, that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature;" it should be remembered that men's growth and attainments are immensely different: but the inward evidence of union with Christ must bear proportion to the degree in which it is manifest that this new creation has been experienced.

This doctrine therefore is clearly contained in the Scriptures; but we cannot fully explain or even comprehend *the manner*, in which the new nature is communicated. In general we may observe, that as natural life subsists in every part of the animal; so spiritual life pervades all the faculties of the soul. It is light, knowledge, and judgment in the understanding,—sensibility in the conscience,—purity, spirituality, and fervour in the affections,—and submission in the will; and this entire inward revolution produces proportionable effects upon the whole conduct and character of the real Christian. But this will appear more distinctly, while,

III. We consider the effects of the change, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The language employed is general, and no exceptions are intimated: but we can only illustrate it by selecting some particulars for a specimen.—He who hath thus "passed from death unto life," will find that his old sentiments and thoughts are vanished away. His high opinion of himself, of his abilities, actions, and heart, are no more; he ceases to shine in his own eyes, and gradually discovers that he is wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked; he is constrained to renounce all dependence on his wisdom and righteousness, to distrust his own heart as deceitful and desperately wicked, and to abhor himself as a guilty polluted criminal. Nor can he ever again recover those lofty thoughts of himself, which once were natural to him.

His hard thoughts of the divine law, as unreasonably strict and severe, are passed away: and he can no longer entertain his former palliating notions concerning the evil of sin. He perceives the commandment to be holy, just, and good; and the transgression of it to be replete with ingratitude, rebellion, and contempt of God. He dares no longer impeach the divine justice and goodness, in respect of the punishments denounced against sinners; his old thoughts and reasonings on these subjects are gone, and he is astonished at his own presumption, in having formerly indulged them.

His sentiments concerning the happiness to be enjoyed in worldly pleasures, and the gloom and melancholy of a religious life, are wholly changed.

He can no longer think of eternity as uncertain or distant; and no temptation or discouragement can henceforth prevail with him, to give up his hope of everlasting life, to rest satisfied with a portion in this world, or to risk the tremendous consequences. "He looks not at the things which

Digitized by Google

are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

His former thoughts of Christ and his salvation are passed away. He once despised the glorious Redeemer in his heart; perhaps he deemed those to be hypocrites or enthusiasts, who spoke in animated language of his love and preciousness: but these imaginations are no more; he is now ready to exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!"—He counts all but loss for Christ, and fears exceedingly coming short of his salvation. He cannot think meanly of him, or be indifferent to his favour, cause, or glory; yet he continues dissatisfied with the degree of his admiring love and gratitude to such a benefactor.—His former opinions concerning the wise and happy among the sons of men are irrecoverably gone. He pities the very persons whom he once admired or envied: he counts the despised and afflicted disciples of Christ, "the excellent of the earth, in whom is all his delight." He longs to share their privileges and felicity: yet could not recover his former aversion to them, even if he supposed that he should be for ever excluded from their company.

When any one is in Christ a new creature, his old pursuits and pleasures also pass away.—As the man of business has done with the pastimes of childhood: so the believer ceases to relish those scenes of dissipated or sensual indulgence, which once were his element. He finds himself uneasy, when they come in his way: not only deeming them a criminal waste of time and money, and a wilful hindrance to serious reflection; but feeling them to be a chasm in his enjoyment, and an interruption to his comfort, in communion with God, and the company of his servants.

His conduct is still more decided in things directly evil; "How shall he that is dead to sin live any longer therein?" He hates and dreads sin as his worst enemy. "His seed remaineth in him, that he cannot sin, because he is born of God." He does not indeed forsake his lawful employments; but he gradually learns to follow them from new motives, and in a new manner; not from covetousness, or on worldly principles; but as his duty from love to God and man, and according to the precepts of the sacred Scriptures.

It will readily be perceived, that the old companions of such a man will pass away. Even when relative duties, and other causes render some intercourse with ungodly persons unavoidable, it will become less cordial and intimate. When such opposite characters meet, one of them must be out of his element: all those associates therefore of the new convert's former years, who have no interest in continuing the acquaintance, will drop off, as leaves from the trees in autumn: and he will find, that the society of his most agreeable old companions is become irksome; for they seem far more profane and frivolous than they used to be.

Time would fail, should we particularly consider how the new convert's former discourse is passed away: and how his idle, slanderous, profane, or perhaps polluting words, are exchanged for such as are pure, peaceable, and edifying. Eph. iv. 29. v. 1. Col. iv. 6. James i. 26. iii. And it is needless to insist on it, that his old course of behaviour also is finally renounced. The particulars that have been mentioned may serve for a specimen; and it should be remembered, that in every respect in which "old things pass away, all things become new:" for the apostle, by inserting the word *behold*, hath emphatically demanded our attention to this circumstance.

This too might be illustrated by considering the various operations of the believer's mind, and the objects of his affections. He hopes and fears, grieves and rejoices, feels desires and aversions, in a new manner, and concerning new objects. He fears the wrath and frown of God; he hopes for glory and immortality; he mourns for his own sins, and the miseries of other men; he rejoices in God, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and abhors that which is evil. His judgment and taste are gradually formed upon God's word; his memory is replenished with divine truths, and his imagination employed in realising invisible things. The company of his choice, the

Digitized by Google

places of his willing resort, the books he prefers, his select topics of discourse, the use he makes of his time and talents, the manner in which he conducts his business, and enjoys the comforts of life, might be enlarged upon, to shew in what respects "all things are become new." For the real Christian desires, "that whether he eat or drink, or whatever he do, he may do all to the glory of God."

The extent of the apostle's meaning may however be further illustrated, by stating how the believer does the same things in a new manner, in respect of that which was the *best part* of his former conduct, and that which is *the worst* of his present.—He used perhaps to attend on religious ordinances; and though his heart was not engaged, nor his professions sincere, he returned home well satisfied with having done his duty, or elated with an idea of his own goodness. But now, when his prayers and praises are the language of his habitual judgment and desires, and he is upon the whole a spiritual worshipper; he is continually humbled for the unallowed defects and evils of his services, and seeks to have them all washed in the atoning blood of Christ.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that sin dwelleth even in the true convert; and he may possibly fall into the same evil, in which he once habitually indulged with little remorse. But in this case he is filled with anguish, he deeply abases himself before God, confesses his guilt, deprecates deserved wrath, submits to sharp correction, craves forgiveness, and "prays to be restored to the joy of God's salvation, and upheld by his free Spirit." Even in these respects, "all things are become new."

In short the proposition is universal; and the true believer, in all things acts from new motives, by a new rule, and to accomplish far other purposes, than he formerly had in view. But the more particular examination of the subject must be left to your private meditations, while we conclude at present with a brief application.

There are persons professing to be Christians, who avowedly disregard this subject; and if we speak of regeneration, or the new creature, are ready to answer, "how can these things be;" or perhaps to retort an indiscriminate charge of enthusiasm. But do you intend to answer your Judge in this manner? Do you expect to enter heaven, by disproving the truth of his most solemn and repeated declarations? Is your judgment the standard of truth? Can nothing be needful to salvation which *you* do not experience? If God be indeed glorious in holiness: if the society and joys of heaven be holy, and if man be unholy; an entire change must, in the very nature of things, take place, before man can possibly delight in God or enjoy heaven; were there no other obstacle to his salvation. Let me therefore earnestly beseech you to re-consider the subject: let me prevail with you to search these Scriptures, and to beg of God to shew you the true meaning of them; and to grant, that if these things be indeed true and needful, you may know them by your own happy experience.

Again, some religious people profess to *know* that their sins are forgiven, and others are anxious to obtain this assurance. If then it be asked, how can any man be thus certain in this matter? I answer, by a consciousness that "he is in Christ a new creature, that old things are passed away, and all things are become new." When our Lord forgave the sins of the paralytic, he enabled him to carry his bed; this proved his sins forgiven, both to himself and others. And in like manner, when we know that, in consequence of having applied to Christ for salvation, we abhor all sin, love the ways of God, and delight in pious company; we have a witness in ourselves, and the testimony of God in his word, that we partake of the gift of righteousness by faith. The clearer this evidence of our new creation appears, the fuller ground of assurance we possess; we are therefore exhorted "to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure:" but without this, all impressions and supposed revelations, declaring our sins to be pardoned, are manifest delusions; for they contradict the express testimony of God in his holy word.

Digitized by Google

Too many profess the gospel, who give no evidence of this gracious change, and stumble others by their unholy lives: but the text at once cuts off such men's pretensions; and the reproach ought to rest on themselves, and not on the holy doctrines which they disgrace.

But as "the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day," I would earnestly and affectionately caution the serious inquirer, not to undervalue the feeble beginnings which he experiences; but to take encouragement from them to press forward, in the diligent use of the means of grace; that the change may be rendered more evident, and that he may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost."

Let discouraged souls likewise, who feel sin to be their burden, grief, and terror, and who are ready to say to the Saviour, "Lord, to whom shall I go, thou hast the words of eternal life:" let such fainting and feeble-minded believers, learn to derive encouragement from their very fears, jealousies, sighs, groans, and tears, because "of the sin that dwelleth in them;" and "because they cannot do the things that they would: for these are without doubt, effects and evidences of the new creation.

Finally, my brethren, if you can rejoice in the assurance that you are partakers of these inestimable benefits, shew your gratitude to God, by endeavouring to communicate the same blessings to your fellow-sinners: knowing that his mercy and grace are sufficient for them also; that he makes use of reconciled enemies, as instruments in reconciling others also to himself; and that he preserves them in life especially for this most gracious purpose.

SERMON VII.

THE DANGER OF REJECTING THE GOSPEL.

PSALM, II. 12.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

WHATEVER were the immediate occasion of this psalm, it evidently contains a most remarkable prophecy concerning Christ, and the divine vengeance to be inflicted on those who opposed the establishment of his kingdom. The Jews were the peculiar objects of the threatened indignation; and they are also the witnesses of the authenticity of those Scriptures, in which the prophecy is contained; for by them the Old Testament has been preserved; and they now unanimously attest that the psalm before us was written at least a thousand years before Jesus of Nazareth was born.

It may therefore be useful in the first place to call your attention to this remarkable prophecy of things already accomplished, or hastening to an accomplishment.—"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? the kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed." Let us hear the apostle's application of this passage: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*" Acts iv. 25. 28. These concluding words are well worthy of our notice: as they illustrate the plan of divine providence in the government of the world. We are apt to wonder,

Digitized by Google

that wicked men should be permitted to triumph as they often do; not considering that the Lord employs even rebels to fulfil his righteous purposes; and that, contrary to their own intention, they are made the executioners of his vengeance, or used as his chastening rod. Even atheists and infidels, yea, the haughtiest and most self-willed of his enemies, are permitted to prosper, till they have inflicted condign punishment on sinners, perhaps less criminal than themselves, and then they are consigned to more tremendous vengeance.—Nay, the Lord even makes use of wicked men to accomplish his designs of mercy to the church. Thus the Jewish rulers and priests, with Herod, Pilate, and the people of Israel, though before at enmity with each other, combined together against the Saviour of the world: they thought evil against him and his church, "but the Lord meant it for good." Genesis l. 20. And they could only do what "his hand and counsel had determined before to be done."

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed," or his Messiah: "saying, Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords from us." All the power and policy of man seemed to be leagued together, with a fixed determination to destroy Jesus, and extirpate his doctrine.—His numerous and formidable enemies unanimously resolved that "they would not have this man to reign over them." The priests and rulers excited the people to demand his crucifixion with unrelenting vehemence. They aimed to blot out the remembrance of him and his spiritual dominion from the earth, that they might have no authority but that of the magistrate. "We have no king but Cæsar; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." Observe, my brethren, what was their principal objection to the religion of Jesus, and whence it arose. They hated the law and government of God; and therefore they rebelled against the kingdom and authority of his Son. Thus men still reject the gospel, because it magnifies and honours the law and justice of God, condemns all their former transgressions, and with the proposal of a gracious pardon, implies an obligation to obedience in future: and in this respect the same part is acted over and over again, from generation to generation.

But mark what follows; "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision:" He looks down with contempt and disdain upon their puny attempts to subvert his kingdom and counteract his sovereign purposes.—"Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." Let us see how this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews crucified the Lord Jesus for declaring that he was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. But behold, he demonstrates himself to be that glorious Redeemer! He dies indeed, but he rises from the dead, ascends into heaven, takes possession of his exalted throne, and sends forth his Spirit upon his apostles, that they may be empowered to establish his religion in the world. The Jewish rulers and people, however, having blasphemed his miracles and condemned him to the cross, persist in their enmity, oppose his ambassadors, and persecute his harmless disciples.—But what is the consequence?—The gospel rapidly gains ground; persecution drives believers into remote regions, to convey the glad tidings to mankind; the dying martyrs, confirming their testimony by their harmless lives and patient sufferings, shew the excellency of their principles, and expose the odious cruelty of their adversaries. At length the day of vengeance arrives: he that sitteth in the heavens had poured contempt upon his impotent foes, and triumphed gloriously, notwithstanding their feeble though determined opposition: but now, "he speaks to them in his wrath, and vexes them in his sore displeasure." Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman legions, the executioners of the sentence which had been pronounced: miseries till then unknown are inflicted on the devoted nation; eleven hundred thousand persons perish in the siege; the survivors are sold for slaves, till no more purchasers can be found; the city and temple are entirely destroyed, and the sacred hill of Zion given up to be henceforth "trod-

Digitized by Google

den under foot of the gentiles," according to another memorable prophecy, which hath now been fulfilling for near one thousand eight hundred years! Luke xxi. 24. An apostate emperor attempts, in defiance of Christ, to rebuild the temple and restore the Jews; but his design is frustrated by earthquakes, and the signal interposition of heaven: while the Jews themselves, scattered through all nations, and almost every where oppressed, are reluctant witnesses to the truth of the Scriptures, and monuments of divine vengeance on the despisers of the gospel.

The Roman emperors also exerted their extensive and absolute authority in opposing the establishment of Christianity; and it is remarkable, that several of those, who are celebrated for *virtue*, were the most determined persecuters!—But what was the event? from that time this mighty empire was undermined, and at length Christianity was established, as it were, upon its ruins!

It would not be a difficult task to shew, from the history of succeeding ages, that God hath fulfilled his promise, in maintaining his church against the most virulent rage of her numerous and powerful enemies; according to the next words of this prophecy, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion:" and the event will be the same with all other rulers and nations, who set themselves to oppose the kingdom of Christ.—For a season they may prosper, boast, and blaspheme; and say, with Sennacherib, to the servants of the Lord, "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Ye shall not be delivered into my hands.—Behold ye have heard what I have done unto all lands, and shall ye be delivered?"—But God will answer them, as he did the proud Assyrian, "I know thy abode, and thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into my ears; therefore I will put my hook into thy nose, and my bridle into thy lips; and I will turn thee back by the way in which thou camest.—The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this;" for he hath said, and he will accomplish it, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Isaiah xxxvii. 10, 11, 28—38.

But the prophecy still further expands itself; "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings, be instructed ye judges of the earth." The counsel is addressed to kings, because monarchy was the more general kind of dominion in those ages and nations: but all invested with authority are evidently meant, by whatever titles they may be distinguished. They are the judges of the earth, whose judgment is submitted to in all the secular concerns of mankind. These dignified personages are admonished to be wise, and welcome instruction; especially in respect of the kingdom, which the Lord hath established under the government of his only begotten Son.—It therefore follows, "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with reverence."

'Submit to the authority of God: bow your sceptres to the sceptre of the Messiah: employ your power and influence, in obeying his commands, and promoting his glory: presume not, in any case, to set your authority in opposition to his, lest he dash you in pieces like a potter's vessel. Stand in awe of his power, reverence his majesty; and, while you rejoice in your exalted rank, and all its alluring appendages; tremble also, lest they should occasion your deeper condemnation.—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way; when his wrath is kindled, yea but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

The conclusion of the Psalm is very emphatical; and the turn given to the address may imply far more than is expressed, with the trivial change in the punctuation, above adopted. This is frequently the manner of the sacred writers. "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Digitized by Google

The Psalmist having said, "When his wrath is kindled, yea but a little," breaks off abruptly, as if meant to add, 'I will not, I cannot describe the misery of that man, against whom the wrath of Christ is kindled in the least degree: I leave the subject as too dreadful to be insisted on; and will rather direct your thoughts to a more delightful consideration; "Blessed are all they, that put their trust in him."

Having thus briefly reviewed this prophecy, I would again demand your attention to its contents, which are too obvious to need much interpretation, and which involve no ambiguity or uncertainty. Have not these predictions, concerning the opposition of the world to the kingdom of Christ, and his triumph over his enemies, been exactly fulfilled? Have not facts corresponded with the evident meaning of the language here used?

These accomplishments of Scripture, in things which no human sagacity could possibly foresee, are unequivocal demonstrations that it is the word of the omniscient God. Ingenious men may easily start plausible objections, or answer arguments with sarcasm, or repartee; but is this a suitable way of treating subjects of such awful importance? Let the opposers of our holy religion stand forth with manly frankness, and fairly prove if they can, that these prophecies were not delivered a thousand years before the coming of Christ; or else that the events have not corresponded to them. Until one of these things has been undeniably effected, we shall continue to affirm, that, so far from believing without evidence, we have unspeakably better reasons to assign for our faith and hope, than unbelievers can have for any of their opinions.

For my own part, after a diligent examination of the subject, during many years, I am fully convinced that the Bible is the infallible word of God; and am thankful that I did not imbibe this sentiment from education or early prejudices, but that it has been the result of a most hesitating investigation: because this gives me a confidence not easily to be shaken, that the gospel will maintain its ground, though all the genius, learning, eloquence, and authority of the whole world should unite against it. Nay, I am assured, that it will survive the ruin of all its enemies; who can only destroy themselves: for they can neither prevent its progress and triumphs, nor hinder the salvation of the meanest believer; but will at length find, "that it is hard to kick against the pricks."—The remainder of the present discourse will contain a more particular consideration of the text, in the following method:—

I. We will inquire into the special nature of that kingdom, which God hath determined to establish.

II. Notice the exhortation of the text: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry."

III. Make some remarks on the warning and encouragement, which close the Psalm—"If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

I. Then we consider the special nature of the Messiah's kingdom. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." This was the purpose of God, even when he created the world. He formed the earth to be a theatre, on which he might display his essential glory: and the person, salvation, and kingdom of Emmanuel, constitute the grandest exhibition of all the mysteries and perfections of the divine nature that hath ever been made. All the dispensations of providence have been arranged, in subserviency to the same great design; as it must be evident to every one, who carefully studies the history of the Old Testament, or indeed the history of the world in every age.

When therefore the tempter had prevailed on our first parents to violate the Creator's prohibition, the promise of a Saviour was immediately given: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" 'The Messiah shall overturn the usurped dominion of the devil, and set up his kingdom on the

Digitized by Google

ruins of it; to the final confusion and destruction of that great ringleader in rebellion against the Lord.—The Messiah as the head of this kingdom was foretold in the law of Moses, and the prophets, who "spake of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." 1 Peter i. 10—12. This was the stone seen in vision by Nebuchadnezzar; which was "cut out of the mountain without hands," and having destroyed all opposition, "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Dan. ii. 31—48.

In the fulness of time the promised Saviour appears; and his messenger goes before him, proclaiming as a herald, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—Now the ancient prophecies are fulfilled: "The blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised." "Behold a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." He leads a lowly and suffering life; he goes about doing good: his most beneficent doctrine is confirmed by benign miracles of the most stupendous nature: all his words and works are stamped with divine wisdom, holiness, love, and power. Yet is he "despised and rejected of men." He dies a spotless sacrifice upon the cross; numbered with malefactors, and treated with extreme contempt, malice and cruelty. He rises from the dead a glorious conqueror, "ascends up on high, leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men; yea for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them." Psal. lxviii. 18. Now "he receives to himself a kingdom," "all power in heaven and earth is given to him:" "angels, principalities, and powers are made subject to him, and he is made head over all things to his church!" His apostles having received the promise of the Spirit from on high, go forth every where preaching the gospel, and declaring that "the same Jesus, whom the Jews had crucified, is exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins:" "That there is no salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given unto men, whereby we must be saved;" while the miraculous powers they exercise and communicate, confirm their testimony, and command attention. Their formidable persecutors are confounded, thousands and tens of thousands embrace the religion of the crucified Jesus; till Jewish infidelity, and pagan idolatry, and all the power and policy with which they are supported, fall down before it, as the image in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, before the stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

In this manner Jehovah attested the despised Jesus to be his well-beloved Son; thus as it were, addressing the Jews, 'Ye have crucified the Lord of glory, because he said, I am the Son of God; but behold I have raised him from the dead! I have exalted him at my right hand in heavenly places.' "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," 'according to my ancient predictions. Now the whole earth shall be his inheritance, whatever obstacles or enemies may oppose him. I have undertaken, and I will accomplish it: all men shall either bow to the sceptre of his grace, and become his willing subjects and redeemed people; or they shall be crushed as obstinate rebels under his feet. This is the determination of the Lord of Hosts."

A mistaken idea of Christianity seems in this respect to be very prevalent. Numbers imagine, that it may be very well to believe the gospel, but that there is no *necessity* of so doing; as others may be safe and happy upon their own plans. But the Scripture uses a very different language; Christianity is there considered as the only true religion, and faith in Christ the only way of being saved. This is no unessential matter, in which men may safely embrace opposite opinions: every man who reverences the Bible as the word of God, must own, that no unbeliever can escape final condemnation: for the Lord himself hath repeatedly attested it; and "he that believeth not hath made him a liar." Let it also be observed, that the great object of our faith is likewise constituted our Judge: and it is never intimated, that in the decisive hour, he will make any exception in favour of the mighty monarch, the renowned warrior, the busy politician or tradesman, the learned sceptic, or the indolent and inconsiderate trifler. "He that

Digitized by Google

believeth not shall be damned." One distinction will then swallow up all others: the faithful disciple will sit down with him upon his throne; and all unbelievers will be punished with an everlasting destruction from his presence.

The kingdom of Christ is administered by him in the character of a Mediator. As soon as sin entered into the world, the Lord made known his purpose of dealing with men, through the intervention of a Peace-maker: in whose person as Emmanuel, and through whose obedience unto the death of the cross, he might honourably shew mercy to the transgressors of his holy law. So that they who oppose his kingdom, not only rebel against the authority of God, but despise the riches of his everlasting mercy. To effect our reconciliation to our offended Creator, the eternal Son of God was made partaker of flesh and blood; and having "suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" he is now ascended into the heavens, as our merciful and faithful High-priest and Advocate. "The government is upon his shoulders," that he might be "able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God through him." Angels, principalities and powers obey and adore him. "He has the keys of death and hell;" he is King of kings, and Lord of lords." The kingdom of nature and providence is administered by him as our brother and friend: "all judgment is committed to him;" "all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily." He is the head of all things to his church, the "fulness of him that filleth all in all."

How astonishing is this language! how stupendous his grace; who from this height of personal and mediatorial dignity and pre-eminence, looks down in compassion on us sinful worms, and seems only to glory in his power, as it enables him to enrich and bless our guilty souls! He reigns upon a mercy-seat, dispensing pardons and gifts to rebellious men: pardons and gifts, which he purchased for them with his own blood! He proclaims his immeasurable love in the blessed gospel; he sends his Holy Spirit to glorify him in our hearts, receiving of those things which belong to him, and shewing them to us, in all their suitableness and inestimable value. He invites all that will, to come and take of these blessings freely; he casts out none that come: and he confers all things pertaining to life and godliness on every waiting soul.

With the highest propriety, therefore, angels celebrated the Redeemer's birth in that expressive song of praise, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill towards men;" for "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Yet if "men refuse him that speaketh;" if they "despise his counsel, and will none of his reproof;" he will most certainly glorify his power in their destruction. "God hath given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow;—and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This agrees with the solemn declaration quoted by the apostles: 'as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." Isaiah xlv. 21—25. Rom. xiv. 11. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

Let it be likewise observed, that "the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light." Not only are all his subjects made heirs of heaven; they have "also the promise of the life that now is;" the full assurance that no good thing shall be withholden from them, and they shall receive an hundred fold even in this present time, for all the losses they sustain from love to Christ and the gospel.

II. Then let us notice the exhortation of the text: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the way:" that is, 'submit and be reconciled to him, before the day of vengeance overtake you.'

This implies, in the first place, submission to the righteousness of God, and a humble acceptance of mercy in his appointed way. We cannot come

Digitized by Google

to the Saviour, except in the character of lost sinners. We are therefore required to humble ourselves before God, and to allow the justice of his awful sentence: and we must not in any measure excuse our crimes, or expect deliverance from wrath, and the gift of eternal life, as in any degree our due. The Scripture no where warrants a sinner to come in this spirit, or to advance such a plea. "Wilt thou," says Jehovah, "condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" Job xl. 8. This was precisely the case of the ancient Jews; "they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Rom. x. 3, 4.

There are two principal reasons of men's rejecting the gospel. In general they hate religion, and desire to live without restraint. They take pleasure in worldly objects: and if not compelled by their circumstances to labour, or engaged in covetous or ambitious pursuits; they love to spend their time and money in gratifying their own humour and inclinations: but submission to Christ is absolutely contrary to such a course of life. When, however, this seems to be in a measure got over; and men take a nearer view of Christianity; they are greatly offended at its humiliating doctrines. To come before God as dependent creatures might be tolerable: but to approach him as justly condemned criminals, is too great a degradation to be endured; especially when connected with self-denial and renunciation of their darling pursuits. A method of salvation, which paid more respect to their wisdom, learning, or other distinctions, and especially to their *virtue and goodness of heart*, would meet with a better reception. To speculate and decide as philosophers, to perform duties by their native energies and good dispositions, and to demand a reward of their distinguished piety and charity, would better suit their feelings; than to be saved by grace alone; to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, to give the Lord the glory of every good desire, thought, word, and action; to rely on the all-sufficient merits and atoning blood of the Saviour, and to receive eternal life as the gift of God in him. Yet the text, compared with the general tenor of Scripture, requires this unreserved submission of sinners to divine justice, and reliance on free mercy and grace, as essential to salvation.

But it also demands from us implicit obedience to the Saviour, as the anointed king over his redeemed people, and over all worlds for their advantage. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the way." When Samuel anointed Saul king over Israel, he testified his cheerful and cordial acquiescence in the Lord's appointment, by the kiss of allegiance. In like manner, we are not only required to welcome the salvation of Christ with unfeigned gratitude, and to express our love by obedience *in some particulars*; reserving to ourselves a *choice*, because we are children, not slaves: but we are called upon to submit to his authority, and yield obedience in all things; and if our repentance, faith, and love, be sincere, we shall cordially render it, only lamenting the imperfection of our most upright and self-denying services. Our past sins will appear to us, as acts of rebellion against our Sovereign and bounteous Creator; present failures will be considered as additional provocations, which need forgiveness through the atoning blood; and our obedience, as the only undeniable evidence of our repentance and conversion. We shall regard every interest or obedience which would draw us aside, as an idol and usurper; every contrary propensity as the remains of our old bondage; and the path of duty as true liberty, the perfection of which we shall long after with groans and tears.

But further, the text commands us, "to honour the Son even as we honour the Father that sent him." 1 John v. 23. Thus the worshippers of Baal *kissed* his image, and the idolatrous votaries of the golden calves used the same ceremony. 1 Kings xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2. Jehovah therefore seems to say in the words of the text, 'I demand for my beloved Son that very adoration, which I prohibited and abhorred when offered unto idols.' When

Digitized by Google

our Lord had said, "I and my Father are One," the Jews accused him of making himself equal with God; and their renewed attempt to stone him, together with the immediate cause of his condemnation to the cross, proves that he neither denied nor evaded the charge. On this point, he and the Jews were at issue; for this supposed crime he suffered and died: but "he was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead." And he who carefully examines the account given of the worship rendered to "the Lamb that was slain," by redeemed sinners, an innumerable multitude of angels, and all creatures, as made known in vision to the apostle, will not be able to mark any difference between it, and the adoration paid to "Him who sitteth on the throne, and liveth for ever and ever." Rev. v. 6. It cannot therefore be wonderful, if the disciples of Christ on earth, should be required to learn the worship of heaven, as a part of their "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light."—But it is time for us to proceed to the remaining part of the subject, and,

III. Make some remarks, on the warning and encouragement, which close the psalm: "If his wrath be kindled, yea but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

What is this but a declaration, that 'if you refuse the salvation of Christ, reject his authority, and deny him the honour due to him, his love will be turned into fiery indignation, and he will glorify his name in taking vengeance on his despisers, as well as in saving and blessing his humble disciples?'—With allusion to the day of judgment, it is said, "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains: and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand." Rev. vi. 15—17. Observe the words, "*the wrath of the Lamb,*" the wrath, not only of an offended King and Judge, but also of a despised Saviour. This will enhance the guilt and condemnation of those who neglect the gospel, and render their condemnation more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Our attention should likewise be peculiarly fixed on the expression, "If his wrath be kindled, *yea but a little,*"—that is, 'should you be found among the more plausible and moderate of those, who refuse submission to the Saviour; among those who have least provoked his indignation; your doom will yet be very tremendous.' This comes home to the case of multitudes. Many persons readily express their abhorrence of the blasphemies, atheism, and other enormous crimes, which, alas, have been perpetrated in a neighbouring nation; and with a latent self-flattery, they rise in their own good opinion, by comparing their conduct with that of such daring enemies to God and his Christ. Others exclaim against those that deny our Lord's divinity, or his atonement; and they seem to feel much inward satisfaction in opposing these dangerous heresies; while some congratulate themselves, that they never scoff at religion, but always speak respectfully of its sacred truths and duties. Thus in various ways men keep up a persuasion that they are Christians: yet if we insist upon unreserved submission to Christ, according to that view of it which hath been stated, they would perhaps acknowledge, they had not gone *so far* in religion. If they have not been avowed opponents, they have in a great measure endeavoured to maintain a neutrality; but such persons should recollect that Christ hath said, "He that is not with me is against me;" so that all will be considered as enemies, who are not his cordial friends and loyal subjects.—Indeed this is a general cause of men's destruction: they compare themselves with some other characters, fancy themselves better than they, quiet their consciences, and go on in the ways of sin and ungodliness.

But what consolation will it be in the day of wrath, should your condem-

Digitized by Google

nation be one degree less heavy than that of your neighbours? Should you approach as near to Christianity, as a man can possibly do, who is not a true disciple of Christ, what would it avail you? Suppose you hesitate, from love to some lawful earthly comfort, which you prefer to Christ, and refuse to part with for his sake: will not that very circumstance render your feelings most exquisitely poignant, when the doom shall be pronounced against you? This cannot be too closely brought home to conscience: for it was a prevailing delusion even at the time when our Lord was on earth. Know, therefore, whether thou art a Judas, betraying Christ for sordid lucre, under the mask of a disciple or a minister; a Pilate, "*washing thine hands*," by giving up his cause from fear of man, and then pretending to excuse it;—a Herod, that openly insultest him;—a Gallio, that carest for none of these things;—or a Felix, who tremblest and stiflest thy convictions. Whether thou join the multitude that cry, "Crucify him, crucify him; not this man but Barabbas;" or with Agrippa, art "almost persuaded to be a Christian;" or "departest sorrowful, because thou hast great possessions:" which of these characters soever belong to thee, know assuredly that thou wilt perish from the right way, unless thou repent, and become a believing and obedient subject of the Lord Jesus. And what will it avail thee, that numbers will be associated in the same condemnation, or even perish in a still more tremendous manner?

But is not this harsh and uncharitable? Hear the words of Christ himself.—"Except a man deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple." "Except he forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Does charity consist in contradicting "the true and faithful Witness," or "in speaking peace, when there is no peace?" The case is the same as it was of old.—Some daringly blaspheme, and openly reject the Son of God: others use respectful language; but their actions shew, that they value the pleasures of sin, the friendship of the world, the pride of life, filthy lucre, or the praise of men, more than him and his salvation. But all such persons virtually declare, that *they* did right, who, actuated by various worldly motives, concurred in nailing him to the cross. None who lived at that time, and might have heard his doctrine, or witnessed his miracles, were wholly free from the guilt of his death, except the remnant of his true disciples: and none at present are wholly free from the charge of crucifying the Son of God afresh, who persist in neglecting his great salvation.

"Blessed then are all they that put their trust in him." They are blessed in their present security and privileges; and they shall be blessed in their eternal inheritance. To you, my brethren, who thus cordially welcome the Saviour, and submit to the king of Zion, with unreserved obedience and fidelity, though with many lamented imperfections; to you belong peace with God, peace of conscience, the adoption of children, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. It is your privilege to "rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulations;" to find support in trials, safety in all dangers, victory over every enemy, and a rich advantage from all losses and sufferings. Whether you be rich and prosperous, or poor and afflicted; whatever your station or circumstances may be, you are blessed; for God himself hath pronounced you so: you shall be blessed through life, and in death; and when the Redeemer shall appear to judge the world. Lift up then your heads, for your redemption draweth near; and when others shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; you shall exclaim with triumphant exultation; "This is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord,—we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Digitized by Google

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGMENT.

1 CORINTHIANS IV. 5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God

THE reception which the zealous, unwearied, and disinterested labours of the apostle Paul met with from mankind, forms the most conclusive proof of human depravity; next to that arising from the contradiction, contempt, and cruelty, which his divine Master had experienced. Not only was this distinguished servant of God "every where spoken against," and treated as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things," by unconverted Jews and Gentiles: the whole body of Jewish converts also were exceedingly prejudiced against him; many of the churches he had planted were alienated from him, and his Corinthian converts had been so perverted by false teachers, as to entertain the most injurious suspicions, as to the motives of his ministerial conduct. But fervent zeal for the honour of Christ, and affectionate longing after the salvation of souls, kept him from fainting, and rendered him "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and he even submitted, with the most evident reluctance, to vindicate his character, and magnify his ministry to the disaffected Corinthians; that, by re-establishing his apostolical authority, he might recover them from the delusions into which they had been seduced. In attempting this, he warned them against exalting some and despising others, of those who had laboured among them. "Let a man," says he, "so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." All Christians are servants of Christ, and the word rendered *ministers*, denotes those servants who wait on any person, as ready at all times to execute his orders with unreserved assiduity.—But ministers are also stewards of the mysteries of God: they are not mere teachers of morality, as some men imagine; but they are intrusted with the great mysteries of revealed truth, that they may declare them to mankind, as they have received them of the Lord. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' It is not necessary for ministers to be orators, courtiers, philosophers, or even men of distinguished genius or learning; but integrity and faithfulness are indispensible. Any person of common prudence would prefer a downright honest steward, though but moderately qualified, to the most accomplished man in the world, who, he was aware, would oppress his tenants and embezzle his property. Thus faithfulness is the grand requisite in a minister; without which, talents may recommend him to the applause of men, but will not procure him deliverance from the wrath of God. "But," says the apostle, "with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea I judge not mine own self; for I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord."—It must not be expected, that every one who aims to be faithful, should thus decidedly rise superior to the opinion of men, especially those within the church. At the call of duty, a minister may be enabled to venture giving offence; yet do it reluctantly, and be drawn into many re-

Digitized by Google

serves, under the notion of prudence, which may greatly impede his usefulness. Christians should therefore take heed, that they do not inadvertently tempt ministers to unfaithfulness, or render faithfulness uneasy to them. The apostle no doubt did examine his own motives and conduct; but he knew that an appeal lay from his decision to that of his heart-searching Judge; and that reflection gave rise to the caution and warning of the text; —"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." Let us then,

I. Meditate on the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event.

II. Consider the discoveries which will then be made.

III. Advert to the consequences of those discoveries.

I. I would call on you to contemplate with me, the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event.

The sacred Scriptures continually lead our thoughts to this great crisis, when the important and eternal interests of the whole human species will be finally determined. The servants of God from the beginning of the world looked forward to it: even "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these things: saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Jude 14, 15. That profession which Job ardently wished might be "graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever," seems to have had as much respect to the second coming of the Lord, as to his first appearance in our nature; "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Job xix. 23—27.

Omitting various passages from the prophets, that call our attention to this grand event, we may properly make a quotation from the fiftieth psalm, which is a most sublime, prophetical description of a future judgment, "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence, a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth that he may judge his people. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, *for God is judge himself.* Selah." Psalm l. 3—6. The words of Solomon shall close these citations from the Old Testament. "Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will call thee into judgment."—"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Eccles. xi. 9. xii. 14.

In the New Testament the same subject continually demands our attention. Christians are said to "wait for the Lord from heaven, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come," to "look for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," and "to love his appearing." Thus the language of the Old Testament relative to the coming of Jehovah, and our preparing to meet God, who is judge himself, is applied to Christ, by his apostles, without the least hesitation. And with a conscious dignity, he spake of himself, in his lowest abasement, as the judge of the world, and the arbiter of men's eternal state, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations." Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

Digitized by Google

The coming of the Lord signifies, therefore, the appearance of Christ in human nature to judge the world: when he shall exercise omnipotence, omniscience, and every divine perfection; and so "come in his own glory" as Mediator, "and in the glory of the Father," as sovereign Lord of all. This revelation of Jesus Christ will be visible to the whole world, "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven." "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they that have pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so. Amen." Acts i. 11. Rev. i. 7. The man Jesus, in his glorified body, even that body which was crowned with thorns, scourged, spitted on, and nailed to the cross; will then be made visible to all men, to those who thus abused him, and to such as have in every age consented to this deed by despising him and his salvation. He will be seen by "all who have crucified him," as it were, again and again; as well as by them, for whom "he once suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring them unto God."

But how immensely will his appearance, as judge of the world, differ from that of the man of sorrows!—The mount of transfiguration, when "his countenance shone as the sun, and his raiment was like lightning;" yea, the vision of his glory, which caused his beloved disciple, who had once reclined on his bosom, in the familiarity of endeared friendship, to "fall down at his feet as dead;" can give us but a faint idea of that divine light and majesty, with which he will be arrayed, when he shall ascend his awful tribunal. "He shall then be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels:" *the angels of his power* and authority; the ministers of his vengeance and his love.—"At the end of the world, the Son of man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect." Matt. xiii. 41—43. xxiv. 30, 31. Hence it is evident that all the angels are the creatures and servants, as well as the worshippers, of the incarnate Son of God.

His coming will be announced by a summons august and tremendous beyond description; and immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." "Behold I shew you a mystery! We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."—"The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. John v. 28, 29. Believers will rise first, and then such of the saints as shall be alive on the earth at that time, will be changed; that "death may be swallowed up in victory." Afterwards the multitudes of the wicked will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."—The bodies of the unnumbered millions, who through succeeding ages have inhabited the globe, wherever laid, or however consumed, will be restored to life, and reunited to their immortal souls, that they may participate their happiness or misery. "Then the dead, small and great, shall stand before God. The sea shall give up the dead that were in it; and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which were in them." Rev. xx. 13—15.

At this important crisis, the earth and all its works, yea, the visible heavens also, shall become one general conflagration: "the heavens and earth which now are, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass

Digitized by Google

away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works which are therein shall be burnt up." 2 Peter iii. 10—22. Yea, "heaven and earth shall flee away, and there shall be found no place for them."

In vain should we attempt a description of this sublime and awful scene: our faculties labour, and our tongues as it were faulter, when we would think or speak of such subjects!—What then will be the feelings of the immense multitudes assembled on this occasion! What the astonishment, terror, and despair of the impenitent! of such as have idolized those things, which are the prey of all devouring flames: of those who have blasphemed that Saviour, who appears to be their Judge, or ridiculed the divine testimony concerning the place of torment, and those evil spirits which are ready to seize upon them? Let us then recollect, that *we* shall be present, not as mere spectators, but as cited "to give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. v. 10. Our present conduct is voluntary; we choose whether we will serve the Lord, or no: but we shall not be allowed to choose, whether we will stand before his tribunal, or decline the awful decision.

It is extremely frivolous to start objections against the doctrines of revelation, taken from our low apprehensions, or levelled against the misinterpretations of injudicious believers. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." He hath declared these things in his authenticated word: "his testimony is sure and giveth wisdom unto the simple:" and he "that believeth not hath made him a liar."

Will any man presume to say, that it is impossible for God to raise the dead? That human nature should be capable of such daring absurdity, ought to cover us with shame, and cause us to tremble.—Let us, my friends, imitate the old patriarch, who "by faith being warned of God of things not seen as yet, was moved with fear and prepared an ark." Let us prepare to meet our God, and seriously inquire "who may abide the day of his coming? or who may stand when he appeareth?"

Neither ought we to regard those "scoffers," who according to the prediction of the apostle, are "come in these last days, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." We know not indeed the precise time when the Lord shall come; but we should not be ignorant that, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day:" and we are assured that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. Death is very near, and judgment follows. In this sense "The Judge standeth at the door:" and "the end of all things is at hand." "Be ye therefore ready; for ye know not the time when the Son of man cometh." The intervening space will soon elapse: let us "then account his long-suffering to be salvation:" and "seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent, that we may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless."—We proceed therefore,

II. To consider the discoveries which will then be made.—"The Lord shall come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all his holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats:"—that is, with perfect ease, and infallible certainty. Then shall he be seated on the great white

Digitized by Google

throne, the emblem of his awful justice and spotless purity, "and the books shall be opened."—This expression, referring to the affairs of men, leads our thoughts to the discoveries of that solemn season. *The book of the divine law* shall be opened, as the perfect standard of good and evil; *the book of providence*, stating the talents committed to the stewardship of each individual, with the advantages or disadvantages of his situation; *the book of omniscience*, developing all the particulars of every man's conduct, and all the motives and thoughts of his heart; and the *book of conscience* or memory, answering to every charge or discovery, however before buried in oblivion. But *another book* shall also be opened, or no flesh could be saved; even *the book of life*, in which all the elect of God, all true believers, are registered, with the evidences of their repentance, faith, and love. Then, all "men will be judged out of those things, which are written in the books, according to their works. And whosoever shall not be found written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire." Rev. xx. 12—15.

We know but little of the real characters even of those with whom we are most intimately acquainted; and far less of other mens. A vast proportion of their outward conduct is concealed from us: what strangers then must we be to the dispositions and counsels of their hearts! Perhaps a tenth part of the actions of our nearest relatives or friends, do not come under our notice: we must therefore judge as well as we can; and though caution be necessary, a measure of suspicion adequate to our uncertainty, would mar all our earthly enjoyments. David seems not to have suspected Ahithopel, nor the Apostles Judas: yet they were both plausible hypocrites. Many of you, my friends, may perhaps be conscious, that if your neighbours, or relations, knew certain things in your conduct, which you carefully and successfully conceal; your characters would be injured, and yourselves covered with confusion. "But when the Lord shall come, he will bring to light all these hidden things of darkness." Then the dishonesty and extortion which have here escaped detection, and even suspicion; or which have been pleaded for with specious fallacy, will appear in all their deformity before men and angels. The oppression, rapine, and cruelty, which have been gilded over with the splendour of great talents and renowned atchievements, will be viewed in another light: when "the earth shall disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain." Nor will that degrading licentiousness and sensuality, which are often covertly practiced by persons of decent or respectable character, any longer be concealed; though it be now a shame "to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."

But to relieve our minds from such painful reflections, let us take a view of the contrast. The Lord will also bring to light the good works of his believing people: "he saw them in secret, and he will reward them openly." Those fruits of faith and love, which the world perhaps vilified and called by some opprobrious name; and those, in which they scarcely "let the left hand know what the right hand did," will then be disclosed and approved by the righteous Judge. The self-denial of his despised disciples, in sparing from every article of expence and indulgence, to raise a little fund for the relief of the needy, and even of their calumniators and persecutors: their secret prayers, and compassionate tears over the very persons, who counted them harsh and uncharitable, because they would not "speak peace when there was no peace;" Jer. xiii. 17. their scrupulous care to avoid every degree of injustice, when no blame was likely to be cast upon them for it; their earnestness in secret devotion, with deep humiliation and enlarged benevolence: all these will be discovered when the Lord shall come, and greatly tend to illustrate and distinguish the characters of men. The blemishes and misconduct of pious persons are too often visible to their neighbours, and give occasion to their scoffs and impiety: but it will then appear, that these things were lamented before God with many groans and tears; that they condemned themselves more severely than others could condemn them; that they prayed without ceasing not to be left to repeat their sin and folly; and

Digitized by Google

that they spared no pains, and vigilantly used every means of crucifying their evil propensities, and bridling their appetites and passions.

The discoveries of that solemn day will likewise relate to men's words. "Every idle word that men shall speak, shall be given an account of at the day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matt. xii. 34—37. Our words must indeed be known in some measure to others: but men are commonly very careful to whom they declare their unreserved sentiments; and would often be extremely disconcerted, if their discourse in private circles, among the select companions of their vices, should be disclosed to those, with whom they desire to maintain another kind of character. But the profane, blasphemous, atheistical, infidel, abominable speeches, which men vent in their secret cabals; with all the falsehoods, slanders, boastings, bitterness, imprecations, and horrid language, which on some occasions they utter, during the whole course of their lives, will be produced against them before the assembled world. "For the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; it sets on fire the whole course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." James iii. 5—10. The secret influence of evil conversation, corrupts men's principles and morals, and wounds their reputations; it ruins domestic and relative comfort, and disseminates impiety, infidelity, heresy, profligacy, enmity, discord, and confusion, through neighbourhoods, cities, and nations. Yet no discovery can be made of such private mischiefs, except by the omnipresent and omniscient Judge. It would be tedious to insist particularly, on the flatteries, deceptions, false colourings, seductions, and other artifices, by which wicked men carry on their base designs. These, however, are hidden things of darkness, which will be brought to light when the Lord shall come. If, then, all our words without exception, whether spoken openly, or among our select companions, shall be thus made known at the great decisive day, could nothing else be produced against us, we must surely feel that this alone would overwhelm us with confusion. The story is well known, of the person who invited a company of his friends, that were accustomed to take the Lord's name in vain, and contrived to have all their discourse taken down and read to them. Now if *they* could not endure to hear the words repeated, which they had spoken during a few hours; how shall we bear to have *all* that we have uttered, through a long course of years, brought forth as evidence against us at the tribunal of God?—but the hour is coming when this will actually be the case: when not a single irreverent mention of the Creator's sacred name; not one objection to his law, government, or gospel; not one sarcasm or jest upon his cause or worshippers, shall be overlooked! when every word "spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed on the house tops!" Where then will the wicked and ungodly appear? How shall any of us endure that scrutiny; unless we have fled for refuge to the hope of the gospel, and all our sins have been buried in the depths of the sea?

But words of another kind shall be made known when the Lord shall come. The servants of God love to associate together, and many censure them for it: but what saith the Scripture? "They that feared the Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name; and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Mal. iii. 16—18. When the "books shall be opened," the social piety, gratitude, and charity of true Christians will be brought to light. Their discourse about the perfections, ways, and works of God; the best methods of promoting his glory, the peace of the church, and the benefit of mankind: their mutual warnings, exhortations, counsels, and encouragements; their spiritual, affectionate, and animating

Digitized by Google

conversation; and all the words which the Lord delighted to hear, will be made known before men and angels. And when these shall be contrasted with the filthy, impious, and frivolous speeches of the wicked; it may easily be conceived, how men's real characters will be discriminated, and in what sense "by their words they will be justified or condemned."

The thoughts also of every heart shall be disclosed. Men generally imagine, that these at least, are free and subject to no controul; so that they allow their memory and imagination, to excite and feed corrupt affections; representing to themselves, with all the ingenuity of invention, scenes that accord to their predominant propensities: and by these speculative indulgences they try to make themselves amends for those restrictions, which regard to reputation, interest, or health may impose.—But God especially requires purity of heart, and truth in the inward parts, by which real religion is distinguished from hypocrisy. "Ye fools," says our Lord to some of these whited sepulchres, "did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also? Thou blind Pharisee, first cleanse that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also." Matt. xxiii. 25—28. Luke xi. 39, 40. How would it astonish us, if we could see all that passes in the thoughts of many very *virtuous* persons, during a single day! And as to the imaginations of the profligate; they are the very residence of evil spirits, in which they forge all manner of abominable crimes, previous to the actual commission of them. Instead therefore of men's hearts being better than their lives, as self-flattery often suggests, they are uniformly far worse: for every sinful word and action was at first an evil thought and desire; but ten thousand evil thoughts and desires, conceived and cherished in the heart, proceed no further; because men have not opportunity, courage, or ability to realize them in practice.

Every man, however, must judge for himself in this matter: but let us ask ourselves, whether we should feel comfortable, at the idea of *all* our secret thoughts being disclosed, I do not say to the whole world, but to our intimate friends and acquaintance?—Yet they must all be disclosed to men and angels, at the great day of righteous retribution!—"Let then the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*:" for unless evil thoughts are excluded or opposed, every apparent reformation must be hypocritical. "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness, how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Peter seems even to intimate a doubt, whether the thought of Simon Magus's heart did not constitute the unpardonable sin; "pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Jer. iv. 14. Acts viii. 20—24. This is therefore a matter of the greatest importance: and the discovery of those secret thoughts, which no human eye could reach, and which were scarcely ever suspected, will exceedingly help to discriminate characters at the great day. Nay, the countless multitude of vile imaginations and desires, which are the spontaneous production of our depraved nature, will greatly illustrate the truth and justice of God, in all his declarations and decisions, concerning the workers of iniquity.

On the other hand, the thoughts of believers also will be made known, when the Lord shall come. Then it will appear, that they abhorred, watched against, and laboured to exclude every evil imagination, and to repress all sinful desires: that they humbly mourned over the vain-glorious, envious, impatient, and peevish emotions of their hearts; and that they endeavoured to employ their minds, during their retired hours, in holy contemplations.—It will then be known how much their thoughts were occupied, in considering by what means they might best glorify God, and serve their generation; and how many desires they felt, and plans they formed, which they could not accomplish. Their affectionate longings after the salvation of their relatives, neighbours, and persecutors: and the anguish of heart they felt on their account, even when censured as severe and harsh in reproving and warning them, will be brought to light; with all other pious, holy, and be-

Digitized by Google

nevolent thoughts and desires: and these discoveries will evidence them to have been the genuine followers of the holy Jesus.

We must even go further still in this matter: the state of every man's heart, and the motives of his actions will then be fully disclosed. The admired morality of numbers will then be demonstrated to have been only a modification of self-love; without any real regard to the authority or glory of God. The Pharisee's prayers, fasting, and almsgiving will be shown to have resulted solely from pride and ostentation. Many will be proved to have preached the gospel from envy and strife, from avarice or ambition; and to have professed it, as a step to emolument or distinction.—In short every mask will then be taken off; many admired characters will appear completely odious and contemptible; and "the things which have been highly esteemed among men" will appear to have been "abomination in the sight of God." Need I say, how tremendous this must be to dissemblers of every description, who now act a plausible part, and exhibit on the stage of the world in an assumed character?

But on the other hand, the humility, gratitude, zealous love, and holy affections of true believers will be made manifest to the universe. The pure motives of those actions, which were censured or calumniated, will be demonstrated: every accusation will be silenced, all misapprehensions removed; and it will be undeniably evident, that from the time when they made an explicit profession of the gospel, their repentance, faith, love, and habitual conduct were answerable to that profession.—We proceed therefore,

III. To advert to the consequences of these discoveries.

By them the immense difference of character between the righteous and the wicked, will be undeniably manifested. In this world, numbers find it convenient to varnish over their crimes, to palliate or excuse many parts of their conduct, and to cast others, as it were, into the back ground, where they are little observed; while, regardless of their hearts, they have leisure to place their counterfeit virtues in a conspicuous light, and to make them appear immensely better than they really are.—On the contrary, the believer has many infirmities, and is engaged in a sharp conflict with "the sin that dwelleth in him," and with the temptations of Satan. The world rigorously scrutinizes his conduct; and the Lord tries his faith and grace, as silver is tried in the furnace. He is so afraid of hypocrisy and ostentation, that he carefully conceals many things which might exalt his character, and scrupulously shuns the appearance of good before men, when he but suspects that there is not the reality of it in the sight of God. 2 Cor. xii. 6. On these and other accounts, the apparent difference betwixt true Christians, and specious hypocrites or moralists, bears no proportion to the degree in which their characters do really differ. But the discoveries of the great day will perfectly distinguish them, and all the world will "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not."

When the Lord shall thus "bring to light the hidden things of darkness," every mouth will be "stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God." Rom. iii. 19, 20. The discoveries of the great decisive day will completely elucidate this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, which is now so generally misunderstood or opposed: for the whole of men's thoughts, words, and works, will appear so contrary to the holy precepts of God, or so far short of their spiritual perfection, that all must then feel the force of David's words, "If thou, Lord, shalt mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" As therefore "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," all must fall under condemnation, who are not interested in the salvation of the gospel.

But it may be asked, in what sense then will every man be judged according to his works? This shall be reserved for the subject of a separate dis-

Digitized by Google

course: and it may suffice to answer at present, that all avowed unbelievers, however distinguished, will be judged and condemned for the sins they have committed; and all professed believers will be judged according to their works, as proving, or disproving the sincerity of their profession.

The discoveries of this awful day will likewise silence all the blasphemies which are continually uttered against the justice of God in the condemnation of the wicked. It is on this account called "the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." While men conceal or palliate by far the greatest and worst part of their conduct, they may argue plausibly against the denunciations of Scripture; but when the whole of their character and conduct shall be openly exhibited, and all the world shall know every thing respecting them which is now seen by the heart-searching Judge alone; then the justice of the tremendous sentence will be universally acknowledged; the friends of God will perceive and adore his glory in this part of his moral government; and the wicked shall be silent in darkness and despair, when bid to "depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Far be it from us to suppose, that the merciful Saviour, who is TRUTH itself, would use such language on this occasion, if not really applicable to the case! He does not allow us to speak deceitfully for him; and will he utter fallacious words himself?—Yet we cannot hear of eternal punishment, unquenchable fire, outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, a worm that never dieth, and the place prepared for the devil and his angels, without feeling our hearts tremble, and revolt against the description.—How unspeakably dreadful then will be the accomplishment? when the Lord, to stop the sinner's mouth, by a discovery of his crimes, shall say, with stern indignation, "these things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes!—Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Psal. l. 21, 22. Cease then, poor sinner, to object and dispute; and make haste to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek refuge in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A more pleasing subject, however, is before us, while we contemplate the redeemed of the Lord, saved by his grace, washed from their sins in the Saviour's atoning blood, completely justified, absolved from every charge, and "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Then death will be swallowed up in victory; and raptures inexpressible will commence a felicity, still to be increased, with the enlargement of their capacities, through the countless ages of eternity. But I must leave it to your own minds, brethren, to form some conception of the opposite sensations which will delight or agonize every heart, when the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal."

"And then shall every man have praise of God." Then every humble believer, according to his measure of faith and grace, will be honoured with the commendation of his condescending Lord, for those services which the world condemned, and which perhaps his brethren undervalued or censured. To be accosted by the Judge of the world, in these most gracious terms, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," will form an adequate gratification to the noblest ambition of which the rational nature is capable. Seeking for this glory, honour, and immortality, let us here be indifferent to all human applauses or contemptuous reproaches. This is the honour that cometh from God only, and is reserved for all his saints; when no more danger shall remain of their being exalted above measure, or sacrilegiously ascribing any thing to themselves: but when, on the contrary, they will cast their crowns before the throne, and return all to the bounteous Giver, in endless songs of adoring praise. Let us not faint then, on account of our trials and difficulties; for "our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Digitized by Google

Let us also remember the caution, "judge nothing before the time." Our duty often requires us to form some judgment of men's characters and actions: but in all other respects, our business is with ourselves and the Lord, and not with our fellow-servants. And the more diligent we are to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, the less time and thought we shall have to spare, for censuring and condemning the conduct, or suspecting the motives of other men.

But do you, my friends, really believe these things? and are you preparing to meet your Judge? I fear, the actions, conversation, and spirit of numbers awfully prove the contrary. Still, however, the Lord waits to be gracious: flee then to him as a Saviour, without longer delay, who will speedily come to be your Judge. You who profess the gospel, be advised and persuaded to examine yourselves whether you be in the faith: look well to it that your evidences of conversion are clear and decisive; for that day, of which we speak, will detect multitudes of self-deceivers, as well as unmask many artful hypocrites. And if you are conscious of following the Lord with an upright heart, take heed that you do not slacken your diligence, or yield to unwatchfulness: "Let your loins be girded and your lights burning: and be yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord:" "for blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve him." Luke xii. 35—38. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

SERMON IX.

FINAL RETRIBUTION OF BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS.

ROMANS, II. 5—9.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.

In meditating on the solemnities, discoveries, and consequences of that great decisive day, when the Lord shall come to be our Judge; we were obliged to pass over in a general manner, several important particulars relative to the subject: and especially we reserved for a separate discourse, the consideration of the manner in which all men will be judged according to their works, and receive according to what they have done, whether it be good or evil. The present will therefore be an appendix to the preceding discourse, as intended to illustrate its interesting truths, and to render them more perspicuous and impressive. In the passage before us, the apostle does not undertake to decide a controverted point of doctrine, to state the method of a sinner's justification; or to account for that difference of character which actually subsists among the descendants of fallen Adam. These subjects he hath fully discussed in other parts of his writings: but here he takes occasion from his subject to shew, that the opposite conduct of the righteous and the wicked will terminate in future happiness or misery. He considers some

Digitized by Google

persons more favoured by providence than others, as the Jews had every way the advantage of the Gentiles: but he intimates that they generally abused those advantages to their deeper condemnation: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The more kind, patient, and merciful the Lord is, the baser our rebellion and ingratitude must appear; the greater cause have we to repent, and the more abundant motives and encouragements. But if men presume on his lenity, supposing that he will not or cannot punish, and so encourage themselves in sin, they "despise the riches of his goodness and mercy:" and "after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." The treasures which they perhaps covetously and dishonestly accumulate on earth, must be left to their survivors: but the vast accessions, which impenitent sinners daily make to their load of guilt, and the heavy wrath of God against them, are laid up for *themselves*, to be their future and eternal portion. For at the great day of righteous retribution, God "will render unto every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."—In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour,

I. To describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each of them.

II. Compare the statement thus made with several other important Scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

III. Explain more precisely the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles: and,

IV. Make some particular application of the subject.

I. Then I shall endeavour to describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each of them.

The apostle's reasoning throughout this whole epistle proves, that he was speaking of sinners under a dispensation of mercy. He therefore considers a man, thus circumstanced, proposing to himself the acquisition of glory, honour, and immortality. Such a purpose would imply a belief of the Scriptural doctrine, concerning the perfections and government of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of righteous retribution: with a persuasion that eternal happiness is attainable even by sinners, in the way which the Lord hath revealed. At the same time the man is convinced, that the blessing must be sought with diligence and self-denial, and that it ought to be preferred before all other objects whatever. Thus, "while there be many that say, Who will shew us any good,"—"seeking every man his gain from his quarter," pursuing worldly pleasures, honours, and distinctions, or wasting their lives in sloth and dissipation; he "seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and "labours for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life." He is now become a candidate for "glory, honour, and immortality:" and nothing, inferior to an endless inheritance and unfading joys, can satisfy the vast desires of his heart. Whatever he renounces, ventures, or suffers, he resolves to seek "a kingdom that cannot be moved." He feels the force of our Lord's questions, "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" He does not, however, merely seek deliverance from wrath and misery; he is also athirst for happiness in the enjoyment of God, "and of those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore." He attends to religion, not that he may be seen of men, or acquire reputation; nor is he solely intent on pacifying an uneasy conscience: but as a

Digitized by Google

reasonable creature, formed for an immortal existence; he aims, in this introductory scene, to insure felicity in the world to come. He "believes that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" and therefore he seeks his favour as "the one thing needful," and endeavours to render all other objects and pursuits subservient to this grand concern.

It is evident that men of this stamp are very scarce; and that most of those who are called Christians, are wholly strangers to this habitual purpose and conduct. The few who answer the description, are not confined to any single sect, but are scattered about in the visible church, as "men wondered at" for their singularity and preciseness. Now, at whatever period of life, any man is thus brought "to seek glory, honour, and immortality," he enters on a new state, and constitutes a new character; "being made free from sin, he becomes the servant of God, has his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

These persons seek the desired good, "by patient continuance in well-doing." A sinner cannot be said *to do well*, until he humbles himself before God for his transgressions, mourns for them in true repentance, confesses them with self-abhorrence and a sincere purpose of forsaking them, and seeks mercy in the way which God appointed, for the glory of his own name and the honour of his violated law. A rebel can do nothing well, so long as he vindicates and persists in his rebellion, refuses mercy because the terms of it are too humiliating, and is wholly averse to submission and renewed allegiance. The prodigal son when he came to himself, and determined to return home, and humbly crave his father's forgiveness, began to do well. The proud morality, formal devotion, or ostentatious liberality of an impenitent sinner, will never meet the approbation of that God, who sent his Son into the world, "not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Humble penitents, and they alone, begin to answer to the character described by the apostle.

All such persons will likewise credit the testimony of God concerning his Son, and the way of acceptance through his atonement and mediation. Whatever modern reasoners may plausibly advance concerning the *innocence of error*, and the small importance of doctrinal truth: the inspired writers uniformly consider unbelief as springing from an evil heart; and false doctrines, as *damnable heresies*, and *strong delusions*, which God permits as the punishment of those who hate the truth, because they love sin.—"How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another?' "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light *because their deeds are evil.*" "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John iii. 16—21, 36. This is a fair specimen of the Scriptural declarations on this subject; and as Christ "is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man cometh to the Father but by him;" we may assuredly infer, that no one *does well*, according to the apostle's meaning, who believes not in the Son of God, and refuses to seek eternal life as the gift of God in him.

The Lord hath instituted in his holy word, certain ordinances, as means of grace to our souls, and that in them we may render him the glory due unto his name. The characters of whom we speak, will certainly honour the Lord and seek his blessing, by a diligent and conscientious observance of these ordinances. They will also separate from bad company, avoid temptations and occasions of sin, exercise self-denial, and renounce all pleasures or interests, which interfere with the exercise of divine love and the obedience of faith; and they will prove the sincerity of their religious profession, by observing the directions, and copying the example of the Lord Jesus, and by walking in newness of life.

Numbers, like the stony ground hearers, shew much earnestness in these things, and express great confidence and joy: yet they are partial in obe-

Digitized by Google

dience, and continue but for a time. They readily perform such duties as are creditable, cheap, and easy; but they refuse to part with Herodias, or to cut off the offending right hand; they do not mortify constitutional or customary evils, reject unhallowed gain, venture the displeasure of rich and powerful friends, or attend to those things in religion, which would expose them to contempt, reproach and hardship.—Thus they maintain a religious profession, while exempted from peculiar trials; and many pass through life, unsuspected by themselves or others: but "if persecution or tribulation arise because of the word, by and by they are offended."—On the contrary, they, of whom we now speak, have "received the good seed into an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience." They are not partial in their religion, but shew themselves the friends of Christ by doing whatsoever he commands them. They have indeed many infirmities, and may fall into sin through inadvertency; they may even live in some sinful neglect or practice, through ignorance or mistake; but cannot habitually commit known sin. They search out their faults; and as they discover any, repent of, and forsake them. "Their hearts are sound in the Lord's statutes, and they shall never be ashamed."

In this course of believing obedience, the disciples of Christ encounter many temptations, struggle with various discouragements, and are exposed to sharp trials. The contempt and hatred of the world, the assaults of the tempter, the peculiarities of their circumstances, dispositions, and habits, and the chastisements of their heavenly Father, combine to try their patience. Perseverance and constancy, in following the dictates of conscience, expose them to the charge of obstinacy and perverseness, or subject them to heavy losses and difficulties; while inward conflicts, permitted to humble and prove them, sometimes make them ready to faint and despond.—Yet they "patiently continue in well-doing;" they submit to the will of God under afflictions, meekly bear injuries, wait the appointed time for the fulfilment of the Lord's promises, and persevere in the path of upright obedience. They seek for blessings which cannot be expected in any other way: and are ready to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."—Their religion resembles a river, which still continues to flow, though sometimes with a fuller current, and at others with a diminished stream: while that of the hypocrite resembles a land flood, now impetuously deluging the fields, and then wholly disappearing. But to those who thus "patiently continue in well doing," and to them only, will the righteous Judge at last assign the eternal inheritance. "He that continueth to the end shall be saved."

We need not enlarge on the reverse of this character. "To them who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, the Lord will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" yea "upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Such persons, instead of believing the gospel, and in humble repentance embracing the promised salvation, contend against it, "contradicting and blaspheming." They dispute against the strictness of the divine law or justice, and the sentence denounced against transgressors. They oppose their own reasonings against the express testimony of God, in respect of the mysteries of redemption; and venture to charge him foolishly, as if they were more wise and righteous than He.—Being thus "contentious, they do not obey the truth;" submit to God, repent of sin, believe in Christ, separate from the world, or walk in newness of life. For "they obey unrighteousness;" sin, in one form or other, has dominion over them; and their unbelief is the effect of a depraved heart and a rebellious will, which it tends reciprocally to confirm and render more desperate. To persons of this character, the righteous Judge will recompense "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" not regarding their outward privileges or distinctions, but deciding impartially according to their works: for, "there is no respect of persons with God." Let us then,

Digitized by Google

II. Compare this statement with several other important Scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

It is the uniform declaration of the sacred writers, that all men shall be judged according to their works: yet it is equally evident, that faith or unbelief determine a man's state in the sight of God, as justified, or as under condemnation. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." "He that believeth not is condemned already: because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18. v. 24. The same instruction is implied in the apostle's vision, "the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; and whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire." Rev. xx. 12—15.

The prophet having shewn, that the ways of the Lord are equal, was led to state the characters of the righteous, and the wicked; and then he adds, "when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;—repent and turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Ezek. xviii. The true penitent therefore will not be condemned, when judged according to his deeds; which he must be if the solemn process should be conducted according to the strictness of the law, without reference to the grace of the gospel, to which all these invitations and promises belong.

The atoning sacrifices of the Mosaic law, which typified the redemption of Christ, were offered upon Mount Zion: and David, inquiring who should ascend and worship with acceptance on that holy hill, draws a character which entirely accords with that given of a true believer in the new Testament. Psalm xv. Thus he shews us, *which of the professors of true religion*, will stand accepted in the day of judgment: but this has nothing to do with such as openly neglect or oppose revealed truth, or refuse the salvation of the gospel.

In perfect harmony with these Scriptures, our Lord describes his true disciples, "whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, my sister, and my mother." "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." Matth. xii. 49, 50. Luke xi. 28. This word or will of God doubtless has peculiar relation to Christ, and the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him:" and a moral or pharisaical decency of conduct most essentially differs from the obedience of faith. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John v. 10—12. The unbeliever, therefore, whatever his moral character may be, so far from doing the will of God, disobeys his express command, and deliberately affronts his veracity.

Our Lord closed his sermon on the mount with this remarkable passage, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me *in that day*, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and *then* will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built

Digitized by Google

his house upon the sand; and the rains descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Matt. vii. 21—27. Luke vi. 46—49. This passage evidently refers to the day of judgment; but it mentions none except those who call Christ Lord, come to him, and hear his sayings. His professed disciples therefore are exclusively intended; and living faith is described as distinguishable from dead faith by its holy fruits. Disobedient professors will be condemned as hypocrites, or wicked and slothful servants; but avowed unbelievers as "enemies, who would not have the Son of God to reign over them." Matt. xxv. 30. Luke xix. 21—27.

But the solemn description of the great decisive day, given us by the Judge himself, is most conclusive on the subject. Matt. xxv. 31—46. In this important scripture, acts of kindness shewn to believers for the sake of Christ, are the only deeds mentioned, as the reason for the rejoicing words addressed to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." And no charge is brought against the wicked, but their omission of such duties, when the sentence is denounced, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" Yet it will then appear, that the righteous have performed many other good works of divers kinds, and that the wicked have been guilty of numerous other crimes and omissions. Why then did our Lord mention these things exclusively? Doubtless, because he supposed them to constitute the most conclusive evidence of genuine faith, or unbelief. Beneficence, not springing from love to Christ, nor exercised towards his disciples, his *brethren* or representatives, cannot be here intended, as many have inconsiderately imagined,—for who will say, that an indiscriminate liberality, connected with an ungodly licentious life, will entitle a man to the heavenly inheritance? Or if any should venture on such an assertion, would *they* also allow, that the want of this beneficence will expose a man to the awful doom here denounced, however free from vice, or adorned with other virtues, his character may have been? Or will any one maintain, that the liberality of infidels to one another, from any motive, answers to our Lord's words, "I was hungry and ye gave *me* meat;—for as much as ye did it to the least of these *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*?"—Indeed a measure of the same absurdities attaches to every other interpretation of this passage: except that which goes upon the following principles, gathered from the several parts of the Sacred Volume. There is no salvation for sinners, except by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; no interest in this salvation without faith; no true faith, except that which worketh by love; no love to Christ is genuine which is not accompanied by special love to his disciples; and no love to the brethren is unfeigned, which does not influence a man to alleviate their distresses, supply their wants, and do them good, as he hath opportunity and ability. This love is the fruit of the Spirit: where the Spirit of Christ dwells, all the fruits of the Spirit will be produced: and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." A detail of particulars would not have suited the majesty of our Lord's description: the most prominent distinguishing feature of believers and unbelievers was selected; and thus an intimation was given of the rule of judgment, sufficiently clear to the humble student of Scripture, though others may mistake or pervert it. In this view of it the whole is obvious, and coincides with other testimonies of the sacred writers. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because *we love the brethren*." 1 John iii. 14. "Seeing ye have purified your hearts though the Spirit, unto unfeigned *love of the brethren*; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again—by the word of God." 1 Peter i. 22, 23. "If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?" "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and

Digitized by Google

in truth; and hereby we know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him." James ii. 15, 16. 1 John iii. 18, 19. So that love of the brethren, shewn in active kindness, is uniformly required as evidence of our faith in Christ, and love to his name.

These reflections elucidate the following Scriptures also, and are confirmed by them. "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." "The grace of God that bringeth salvation—teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus ii. 11—14.

One most solemn and affecting passage still remains to be considered: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." 2 Thess. i. 5—12. We are here expressly informed, that at the day of judgment, all will be condemned who have not *known God*, and *obeyed the gospel*; but how many persons of moral character and external respectability will be found in that company! No exceptions, however, are intimated; the saints, *even* those that believe, will alone stand accepted by the Judge; and all else will be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence.

I shall conclude this part of the subject, with the words which Christ spake to his servant John, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.—I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. xxii. 12—14. But to whom does the title and privilege of the Tree of Life belong? Surely to the true believer, who loves Christ, and keeps his commandments. "Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you."

This view of the subject harmonizes the whole Scripture, and reconciles those parts which seem to be contrary to each other: but when this centre of unity is overlooked, men either "go about to establish their own righteousness," or run into Antinomianism. These two extremes are the *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, the fatal rock or dreadful whirlpool of our perilous voyage. I have, therefore, endeavoured to mark out the safe passage between them; and may the Holy Spirit guide us at a distance from these and all other dangers, on the right hand and on the left! We proceed then,

III. To state more explicitly, and shew more precisely, the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles.

It is most evident, that the Scripture was intended principally for those who bestow pains to understand it; and this obvious reflection illustrates the propriety of the descriptions there given of the great decisive day: for they certainly relate almost exclusively to those who profess the religion of the Bible. We cannot therefore infer any thing from these descriptions, concerning those who have not been favoured with revelation, or have rejected it: though other Scriptures give some light on the subject. The holy law is the unalterable rule of right and wrong, in respect of all men however distinguished; nor is it possible, that God should judge of characters and actions by any other rule; for the law is the exact reflection of his infinite holiness, and he cannot deny himself. He can, however, pardon the guilty, and make allowance for unavoidable disadvantages. They who know not the will of God, and do it not, shall be beaten with few stripes: but they who know and refuse to do his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. Luke xii. 47, 48. It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and

Digitized by Google

Gomorrah, than for those who heard the doctrines and saw the miracles of Christ, and did not repent and believe the gospel.

The apostle therefore adds, a few verses after the text, "as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law." They have indeed violated the perfect rule of duty: but as they had not the advantage of the written word, they will not be liable to so heavy a condemnation as wicked Jews and Christians: yet, as they acted against the dictates of their own reason and conscience, those remains of the law originally written in the heart, they "will perish without law." For "being a law to themselves," their consciences may indeed excuse some parts of their conduct, but they must condemn others; especially in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ: so that "every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." Rom. iii. 19. All, except idiots, (who scarcely can be thought accountable creatures), know far better than they practice, and might know much more, were not their hearts set against the truth through love of sin. All men must therefore be condemned according to this rule, and the number and aggravation of their crimes, compared with the measure of their advantages, is the standard by which their punishment will be ascertained, by the infinitely righteous Judge.

What the Lord may do *in mercy* to any of his sinful creatures, it does not become us to inquire, beyond what he hath seen good to reveal: but we have no ground to suppose that any who die without spiritual religion can be happy in another world; and neither Scripture nor history countenance the opinion, that the Lord gives his sanctifying Spirit, where he has not sent some measure of the light of revelation.—We are sure, however, that the state of pagans will be far better than that of wicked Christians so called. While we therefore rejoice in our privileges, we may tremble, lest they should increase our condemnation: and the state of the nations, who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death, should animate our endeavours, and excite our prayers for their conversion.

The apostle adds, "as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law." The Jews rejected the gospel, and sought justification by the works of the law. Deists discard revelation, and rely on their own moral conduct to recommend them to God; and various descriptions of professed Christians form a complex law of works, out of the religion of the New Testament. But whatever system, men favoured with revelation may adopt, if they put the event of the great decisive day, on their own works, as the ground of their confidence; they will be judged according to the holy law of God, and fall under its awful curse. "Christ is become of none effect to them: they are fallen from grace, and become debtors to do the whole law." Gal. v. 1—6. The advantages such men enjoy, the crimes they commit, their proud aversion to the humbling salvation of the gospel, and the degree of their enmity and opposition to the truth, will determine the measure of their guilt and punishment, according to the decision of unerring wisdom and infinite justice.

Some observations have already been made on the case of those, who allow the doctrines of Christianity, renounce dependence on their own works, and profess to expect pardon, righteousness, and eternal life, as "the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Such persons, when the Lord shall come, will be judged according to this profession; and if their faith be shewn to have been living and genuine, by its holy fruits, according to the discoveries which have been mentioned, they will, as justified believers, receive the reward of righteousness; and their future glory and felicity will be proportioned to the degree of their grace and obedience of faith. But if their conduct and dispositions have proved that they were not true believers, they will remain under the condemnation of the law, aggravated by their abuse of the gospel; and so have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.

IV. Then let us make some particular application of the subject.

Digitized by Google

In has been before remarked, that "we *must* all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ;" and let this reflection sink deep into every heart. Men voluntarily break the laws of their country, but dire compulsion takes place, when they are convicted and executed for their crimes. The young man, rejoicing in his vigour and flow of spirits, may give a loose to his passions; but let him remember, that "for all these things God will bring him into judgment."—You may now forget God, but he will not forget you, or any of your works. You may affront his justice, and despise his mercy: but he will shortly say, "It is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them." Isaiah xxvii. 11. Now is the day of the Lord's patience, but the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men approacheth: now he invites you to draw near to his throne of grace: shortly he will summon you to his awful tribunal. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many—shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door;" it will be for ever in vain for those that stand without, to cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Now the Saviour pleads with you, in accents of tenderest love; "how long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." But ere long, he will frown on the impenitent and unbelieving, and say, "Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hands and no man regarded; therefore shall ye eat the fruit of your own ways, and be filled with your own devices."—"Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end." Prov. i. 19—31. Deut. xxxii. 29.

But will any of you, with this solemn season of discovery and decision before your eyes, deliberately put the event of it upon the goodness of your hearts and lives? Is there not in your very soul an involuntary shrinking from so strict and awful a scrutiny? Do you not feel a disposition to say, "enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord?" "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who may stand." As you value your immortal souls, do not now insist on any plea, which you feel to be inadmissible in the great day of righteous retribution. Stand not on any distinction between your case and that of your fellow-sinners. Seek above all things an interest in the atonement and righteousness of Christ; and count all but loss that you may win him, and be found in him. Disregard the scorn and reproach of an unbelieving world; anticipating that day, when every eye shall see the despised Redeemer, and his favour be universally allowed of more value than ten thousand worlds.—"Let every one," however, "that nameth the name of Christ, depart from all iniquity." "If we say that we have faith, and have not works, will faith save us," in the day when the Lord shall render unto every man "according to his deeds?" Alas! a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and an unsound profession, will only increase the anguish and shame of final condemnation.

Even if we be true believers, negligence and loose walking will cloud our evidence, and weaken our warranted confidence: while the greatest possible encouragement is given to all genuine good works, by that very system which excludes boasting, and allows none of our services the least share in our justification before God. "Not a cup of cold water given to a disciple, from love to Christ, shall lose its reward." He will accept every kindness to those whom we look upon as his brethren, even as if we had done it to him in person: and while we forgive injuries, love enemies, deny ourselves, endure hardships, or bear any cross, from love to his name, and desire to adorn and recommend his gospel; he notices our poor services, and will applaud and reward them before men and angels.—Nay, if he observe that we

Digitized by Google

form plans and make attempts to promote his cause, and be serviceable to his people; even though he see good to disappoint our endeavours; he will kindly accept the zealous intention, and openly say, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." "Let us not therefore be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not:" and "may we all find mercy of the Lord in that day of retribution," and have an abundant entrance into his kingdom of everlasting glory and felicity.

SERMON X.

GODLINESS THE ONLY SOURCE OF TRUE HAPPINESS.

1 TIMOTHY, VI. 6.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE desire of gain, in one form or another, is universal: for though no one can seek the true riches for himself, without disinterested love to God and his neighbour: yet love to himself, and thirst after happiness, cannot be extinguished: being essential to our nature as God originally constituted it, and not superinduced by the entrance of sin. If, however, the apostle's compendious maxim were generally believed, how many vain projects would be superseded? What fatigues, dangers, anxieties, envies, contentions, frauds, oppressions, wars, murders, and mischiefs, might be prevented!

The context is worthy of our peculiar attention. The servants in those days were generally slaves; and it frequently happened that Christians were the property of Pagans. Such a condition is commonly thought very wretched, and slaves have seldom escaped cruel usage: yet the apostle elsewhere says, "Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it."—The Christian slave is Christ's freed man; for, "if the Son make you free, then are you free indeed:" but the ungodly master is in deplorable bondage; "for he that committeth sin, is the servant of sin."

In this view of the subject the apostle says, "Let as many servants, as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour: that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." For if Christian servants behaved less respectfully to their masters than others did, the heathens would blame their religion, as teaching them to violate the duties of their station. "And they," says he "that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit." No doubt the involuntary servitude of those, who have not, by atrocious crimes forfeited their liberty, is inconsistent with the moral law; and if *real* Christianity should become universal, slavery must be finally abolished. But the apostles were not legislators or civil magistrates: as ministers of religion, they taught men how to act in their several situations *as matters then stood:* and when rulers embraced the gospel, it was proper they too should be taught their duty, and instructed to apply a legal and regular remedy to the evil. But it would have exceedingly increased the opposition made to the gospel, if the preachers of it had attempted, by their own influence, to subvert the existing system in this respect; or even required Christian masters indiscriminately to liberate their slaves.—Whereas, if they were taught to use them as brethren, the ends of humanity would be effectually answered, as to the individuals concerned, and the example would have the most salutary tendency.

Digitized by Google

Having stated this matter, the apostle next showed the sources and consequences of the contrary doctrine; exhorted Timothy to withdraw from vain disputers, who "supposed that gain is godliness:" and then subjoined the words of the text, "but godliness with contentment is great gain;" for, says he, "we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."—

In considering the subject, we may,

I. Notice the connection between godliness and contentment.
II. Show in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain.
III. Deduce some practical instructions.

I. We notice the connection between godliness and contentment, as it is evidently implied in the text.

The word *godliness* frequently occurs in the writings of the apostles, and must therefore be understood according to the tenor of their doctrine. We must not consider it merely as a proper regulation of our affections and conduct towards God, according to the first table of the moral law; but as implying especially the dispositions and demeanour, suited to a sinner under a dispensation of mercy, and invited to reconciliation with his offended God, through the Mediator of the new covenant.

When this has been duly attended to, it will evidently appear that deep humility and unfeigned repentance constitute an essential part of evangelical godliness: for unless we habitually possess this frame of mind, we cannot sincerely make those confessions and supplications, or present those sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are peculiar to Christianity. Now every reflecting man must perceive, that deep humility, accompanied with cheering hope, exceedingly tends to produce contentment. A vast proportion of the impatience and fretfulness of mankind, results from a false estimate of their own merits and consequence. This induces them to consider their trials great, their comforts trifling, the least affront intolerable; and every kind and degree of respect inadequate, except unqualified adulation and submission. But such views of Jehovah and the adoring seraphim, as filled Isaiah with self-abasement; or such apprehensions of the divine majesty, as caused Job to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes," would give them very different views on these subjects. Did they enter into the feelings of the apostle, when he called himself the "chief of sinners," and "less than the least of all saints;" were they ready to own with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" or with John Baptist, "I am not worthy to loose his shoe-latchet;" a total revolution would take place in all their sentiments and sensations about outward comforts and trials, and the usage they meet with from those around them. The sharpest affliction would then appear light and momentary, compared with their deserts: the meanest provision would be received with lively gratitude; while with the patriarch they confessed, "we are not worthy of the least of all thy mercies:" the most unfavourable situation or disagreeable employment would be deemed better than they have a right to expect: and in the greatest injuries or affronts, they would submit to the justice of God, who may correct or punish by whatever instruments he pleases.

Humble thoughts of themselves reconcile men to obscure stations, mean circumstances, and common occupations, as most suited to them: and when they are evidently called to more public services, they enter on them with reluctance and diffidence; except as the lively exercise of faith renders them superior to their apprehensions, and a sense of duty engages them to proceed. Such men are ready to stoop, and in honour to prefer others; they do not complain of being buried in situations, where they are undervalued or neglected. They "think soberly of themselves, and as they ought to think;" and this secures them from manifold disappointments and vexa-

Digitized by Google

tions, to which other men are exposed. "That will break a proud man's *heart*, which will scarcely break an humble man's sleep;" and it is certain that many of the troubles of life affect our peace almost in exact proportion to the degree of our pride or humility. The common opinion therefore, that self-abasement produces melancholy, and that a favourable opinion of ourselves tends to cheerfulness, is an egregious mistake. The former may indeed depress the spirits, when connected with misapprehension, ignorance, and unbelief; and the latter may produce a flow of agreeable sensations, when nothing occurs to ruffle the mind. Such a state, however, is so seldom to be expected in this changing world, and amidst the mortifications to which self-sufficiency exposes men; that the cheerfulness depending on it must be extremely precarious; while patience, meekness, hope in God, and humble gratitude, evidently conduce to an uniform composure and serenity; the direct contrast to disappointed pride and ambition, rankling resentment, sickening envy, and rebellious murmurs.

Even godly sorrow for sin, when accompanied with an humble hope of mercy, produces a tender pleasure, a melting sweetness, a serious joy, a heart-felt satisfaction, which far exceed the utmost refinements of sinful indulgence. Repentance itself, which men postpone under the notion that it is the bane of comfort, is the source of the purest and most permanent rejoicing; and the true Christian must consider those seasons, in which, melted into contrition for his sins, he sowed the seed of his future harvest with penitent tears, as but little removed from the happiest hours of his life.

Faith likewise, which in its varied exercises constitutes a most important part of evangelical godliness is intimately connected with contentment.—As "the evidence of things not seen," it sets before us the holy, heart-searching God, and causes us to speak and act as in his immediate presence. This powerfully tends to calm our tumultuous passions, to awe our souls into adoring submission, and to encourage confidence and humble expectation. Faith descries an invisible world, and places us on the verge of eternity, as about to launch into that boundless ocean. With this prospect before us, the concerns of time shrink into insignificancy: and all that disparity of rank or fortune, which subsist among dying men, and about which their contests, cares, and discontents are principally excited, appear like a fleeting dream, a pageant passing over the stage. Our trials also are perceived to be transient and unimportant; we feel it to be a weakness and folly greatly to disquiet ourselves about such trifles: and discover that our wisdom consists in being careful to discharge our duty, while on our pilgrimage. So that, if "we looked more to the things which are not seen," and less to "the things which are seen;" we should certainly become more satisfied with our lot, and less anxious about our temporal provision.

Faith beholds especially the unseen Saviour; and crediting the sure testimony of God, contemplates him in all the scenes of his life and death. And whether we look to the stable and manger at Bethlehem; the cottage and carpenter's shop at Nazareth; or the well in Samaria, where Jesus, wearied with his journey, sat down at noon and craved a drink of water: whether we follow him to the desert, where he was an hungred while tempted by the devil; to the field, where, with up-lifted hands and eyes, he gave thanks for the barley bread and small fishes; or to the meals which he and his disciples may be supposed to have made on the broken fragments of that humble feast: or whether we meditate on his general poverty, who had not where to lay his head; his scanty maintenance, at one time earned with the sweat of his brow, at another received as the alms of his followers; every object may teach us, "in whatever state we are, therewith to be content." If we turn our thoughts to the contradiction, contempt, and insult, the injustice and cruelty, to which he voluntarily submitted: the patience, meekness, serenity, and love which he manifested, or the glorious event of his sufferings and death: we may, in every one of these reflections, as it were, hear him say, "is it nothing to you, all ye that pass

Digitized by Google

by? Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Nor can we select one scene, which does not most powerfully inculcate resignation, contentment, and thankfulness; whatever our circumstances and difficulties may be. For who fares harder, or is more injuriously treated than the Holy One of God, the spotless sacrifice for our numberless transgressions?

Faith receives also the instruction of Scripture, concerning the necessity, nature, and glory of the Redeemer's undertaking and obedience unto death upon the cross: and this suggests further motives to humble submission, admiring gratitude, and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. The worth of our immortal souls, the evil and desert of sin, our ruined condition as sinners, and the unavailing nature of all earthly possessions or distinctions, with various other interesting subjects, are most emphatically enforced by Emmanuel's cross. Thus, while induced to use every means of securing our salvation; we cannot but grow more indifferent to subordinate interests, and better satisfied with a low and afflicted condition. In this school St Paul learned contentment amidst his multiplied sufferings: yet were we placed in his situation we should have far better reasons for our dissatisfaction than we have been hitherto able to allege.

Neither must we forget, that the believer feels himself to be an habitual pensioner on the Lord's mercy and bounty. He owns that he has no resources in himself: he can neither earn nor buy any thing; but indeed owes an immense debt of which he cannot pay the smallest part. He sues continually for pardon, through the sacrifice of the divine Redeemer who bare the wrath he merited, that his salvation might consist with the honour of the law and government of God: and he is a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat of his offended sovereign, expecting invaluable blessings from his royal bounty. He lives by faith; Christ is "made of God to him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." From his fulness his wants are continually supplied; and he experiences, that his prayers are answered, his strength renewed, his hope encouraged, and his heart comforted, by waiting upon the Lord. And shall a criminal thus favoured be dissatisfied? If *he* yield to murmurs or impatience under the common troubles of life, his inconsistency can only be equalled by his glaring ingratitude.

"Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When thus reconciled, we are admitted into a covenant of friendship; "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and the Son." In proportion to the degree of our faith, we enjoy peace of conscience, and the privilege of bringing all our cares, fears, sorrows, wants, and temptations to him by humble prayer; "casting all our care on him who careth for us." We become interested in all "the exceeding great and precious promises" of the gospel, and that oath by which the new covenant is confirmed; "that we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." We are assured, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose;" and these considerations must powerfully tend to produce inward tranquillity, and that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

At the same time the godly man, in the exercise of faith, sees and acknowledges the hand of God in all the events of life. While we employ our thoughts on men or second causes, we become fretful and peevish: but when we view trials and injuries as the appointment of God, and realize his wisdom, righteousness, and truth, our hearts are rendered quiet and submissive. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Such are the effects of regarding our abode, provision, employment, and even our crosses and sorrows, as appointed by our reconciled Father; and welcoming them as salutary medicines, or necessary, though painful operations, intended for our highest advantage. Nor is this exercise of faith ever wholly separated from the happy experience, that our confidence is warranted, and our expectations answered:

Digitized by Google

for in numerous instances we find those things, which seemed most against us, eventually conducive to our present comfort and future advantage.

It would engage us too long to pursue the subject into its various particulars. Reverential fear, admiring love, spiritual worship, well regulated passions, holy affections, with every hope and earnest of heavenly felicity, might easily be shewn to promote genuine permanent contentment.—On the contrary, whatever men may pretend or imagine, "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked." Poets and novelists have beautifully described contentment; and have often charmed their admirers into a momentary oblivion of their sorrows: but this has made way for subsequent dissatisfaction, with every situation and employment in real life. And all men of information know very well, that many of those very writers have rankled with envy and discontent, because the public has not rewarded their ingenuity with liberality proportioned to their self-estimation!—The citizen fancies that contentment dwells in rural obscurity; the rustic concludes that it may be found in the splendour and pleasures of the metropolis. Courtiers *pretend to think*, that this pleasing companion is inseparable from retirement: the poor erroneously imagine, that it may be found in palaces. Britons amuse themselves with descriptions of Arcadian groves: the Arcadians probably conclude, that none are so happy as the inhabitants of this favoured isle.—But pride, ambition, an uneasy conscience, resentment, disproportionate or disappointed expectation, the insipidity of enjoyment when novelty ceases, the common troubles of life, and the dread of death, render men dissatisfied and uneasy, in every place and station, from the throne to the cottage. They who have it in their power, are continually shifting from one place and pursuit to another; and such as are excluded from this privilege, envy, grudge, and murmur. The world resembles a number of people in a fever, who relish nothing, are always restless, and try by incessant change of place or posture, to escape from their uneasy sensations; but all their efforts are in vain. Does not this single consideration prove, that godliness is the health of the soul, and that without it there can be no abiding contentment?

II. Then we inquire in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain.

There are certain ends, for which especially men desire riches.—They suppose the coveted acquisition would add to their present comfort;—secure them against many future disasters;—furnish materials for future enjoyment;—prove an advantage to their children;—enable them to confer benefits on their friends and relatives;—and put it in their power to be extensively useful. Perhaps all the *reasons*, for which men pursue riches, may be referred to these heads: for when avarice becomes so extreme, that money is coveted without any regard to its use, it degenerates into a kind of deplorable insanity.

But it may easily be shewn, that godliness with contentment answers every one of these purposes, far better than any increase of wealth. The wisest of men, who perhaps also was the wealthiest, says experimentally, "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes." Eccles. v. 11. It is undeniable, that increasing riches insure additional cares, incumbrances, and dangers, rather than any accession of enjoyment. "The grounds of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully;" but he was as much embarassed about securing his abundance, as his poor neighbours were about paying their rent or maintaining their families. Nor was he the only man, who has viewed his treasures with anxious inquiries. What shall I do? where shall I secure them from danger?—Designing men find their advantage in paying court to the wealthy, and employ their ingenuity to impose upon them. Thus they are often surrounded with sycophants in-

Digitized by Google

stead of friends: and even friends become suspected; for the cordiality of confidence is undermined by repeated deceptions, till universal suspicion damps all social intercourse, and destroys the comfort of the most cordial attachments.

Nor does the rich man enjoy any pleasure with higher relish than formerly: he soon loses the exhilaration of new acquisitions and improvements; he has less to hope and more to fear than other men; his abundance and leisure often excite him to improper indulgences; his situation feeds the distempers of his soul; and in proportion as wicked passions predominate, true enjoyment languishes. Something unpossessed or unattainable, still makes him exclaim, "All this availeth me nothing:" "Mordecai will not bow to me," "Naboth will not sell me his vineyard!" While the attempt to obtain the coveted object, or revenge the imagined affront, opens the door to new crimes and miseries.—No wealth can exclude pain, sickness, the loss of friends, or death; and the most prosperous are often consumed with terrors, by the foreboding of calamities. Peace of conscience and hope of future bliss cannot be purchased, and the way in which the wealth of ungodly men has been acquired and employed, render the thoughts of giving an account of their stewardship unspeakably tremendous.

Perhaps there is no delusion so general, or so easily detected, as the opinion that increase of wealth implies an increase of enjoyment.—Where is that man, who has risen from a bare competency to great affluence, that can honestly say, he hath proportionably augmented his happiness? And what numbers confess that their prosperity has been disappointment, "and that all is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

But it hath already been shewn, that true godliness is inseparable from contentment: that it affords cordials in affliction, doubles the enjoyment of prosperity, and makes way for triumphant exultation in the prospect of death. The Scripture sets before us many examples of believers in the depth of poverty, in pain and sickness, bereft of friends or forsaken by them, insulted by persecuting enemies, conversant with stripes and imprisonment, and daily expecting a painful death; who have nevertheless been full of comfort, and have manifested a satisfaction of soul, which made them rather the objects of congratulation than condolence: nor are similar instances wholly unknown at present. But who can conceive a man under the wrath of God, with a guilty conscience, the slave of his domineering lusts, and the sport of his restless passions, to be easy or comfortable in any situation? Godliness therefore does more towards making a man happy, than all other gains and advantages combined together.

But is not wealth a security against future disasters? Is it not a resource in sickness or old age, when trade declines, or when public calamities deprive men of the ordinary means of subsistence?—In some cases it may be *a duty*, in many allowable to make a moderate provision against such emergencies: but it is often impracticable, consistently with our various obligations to God and man: and in ten thousands of instances, it is done in a degree and manner, incompatible with the exercises of faith, and in a worldly selfish spirit. On the other hand, vast multitudes yield to impatience, distrust, envy, and other tormenting passions, because they cannot succeed in their attempts to make such a provision.—But godliness is the best security against future distress. Riches still are *uncertain*, after every effort to change their nature; as late events have loudly preached to all the inhabitants of Europe. The most wealthy have no absolute security, that they shall not end their days in a dungeon, or an alms-house. Unforeseen failures often sweep away the property of the affluent: and in public calamities it is suddenly transferred, to the amazement of beholders: while the rich and noble are reduced to abject indigence and dependence, and their palaces are occupied by the lowest of the people!—In many cases, riches are considered as criminality; and the possessors are proscribed for the sake of confiscations. When famine visits a land, the provisions that avarice had accumulated, are frequently seized by an enraged multitude: nay often the innocent

Digitized by Google

possessor of abundance falls a victim to popular fury. Thus "riches are kept for the owners of them to their hurt." And if they prove insufficient for security in such cases, what can they avail in the agonies of pain, at the approach of death, or in the day of judgment?

But he who possesses that *great gain*, which the apostle recommends, is liable to none of this uncertainty: "no good thing will the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly." "Put thy trust in the Lord, and do good, dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of."—He hath all hearts in his hand, and all riches at his disposal. He need not work miracles, (as in the case of Elijah,) in order to accomplish these promises: yet doubtless all nature would change its course, rather than God would disappoint an expectation warranted by his holy word. We know not indeed by what way our loving Father may see good in his infinite wisdom, to take us home to himself: but we are assured that every circumstance of that event shall be arranged in the most advantageous manner: and till the appointed period shall arrive, no famine can render us destitute, no pestilence can sweep us away: the sword of war, the fury of a multitude, or the malignity of persecuting tyrants cannot reach us. We are safe, and ought to be confident, though an host of men encamp against us: for "the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." "All things are ours, if we be Christ's:" we need not fear, though the earth be removed. Death is our gain: and this single effect of godliness infinitely exceeds in value the ideal philosopher's stone, the power of changing inferior metals into gold. Even the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men, will be the season of the believer's complete redemption, to which he may now look forward with joyful hope. "O Lord God of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

But riches are valued as the materials of future enjoyment.—"Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry: but God said, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Luke xii. 16—21. Our present life is short and uncertain; "Man goeth to his long home." On our journey we only want enough to bear our expences: yet many a traveller groans, through a great part of the road, under the weight of an useless burden, which he must leave behind him on the shore, when he embarks for his eternal residence!—If riches yield little additional enjoyment, during youth and health, they will fail still more in old age. Then the relish for every pleasure becomes languid, desire fails, the organs of sensation wear out, but the passions retain their impotent dominion, unless subdued by divine grace. "Can thy servant taste what I eat or drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women." 2 Sam. xix. 35. The aged sinner resembles the sapless trunk of an old tree; when the branches are lopped off or withered. He clings to a joyless life from dread of death: yet the thought that he must soon die, will intrude, and interrupt his expiring comforts. He becomes a burden to himself, and often to others; and the greater his wealth is, the more reason has he to suspect, that many wait for his death with concealed impatience.

Alas, and is this all!—The sanguine youth, the active man of business, looked forward, in scenes of peril and fatigue, with the cheering expectation of affluence or preferment, and of tranquil enjoyment in declining life, as the reward of intense application. But how great is the disappointment even of the successful! Most of the candidates terminate their course, before the expected season of repose; or languish out their lives in pain and sickness: the highest prize in this poor lottery has been described; while an eternal state is unprovided for! "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities! saith the preacher, all is vanity!"

"But the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The consistent Christian will not greatly regret the loss of pleasures which he has long comparatively despised: for he has resources

Digitized by Google

in communion with God and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Even if poor in this world, he commonly engages the cordial affection of some valued friends, whose society and attention solace the eve of life. Bodily pains and the loss of relatives are rendered tolerable, by the exercise of faith and humble resignation: while the near approach of death, and the prospect of heavenly joys reconcile his mind to transient sorrows and separations. Past experience of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy inspires gratitude and confidence; which are rather increased than impaired by the consciousness of his own unworthiness.—"His outward man decayeth; but the inward man is renewed day by day. Consolation often abounds when flesh and heart are failing. Thus he meets death with composure: and then enters on that fulness of joy, which is at the Lord's right hand for evermore. And is not godliness with contentment great gain?

When the lovers of this present world are silenced, in respect of these reasons for desiring increasing wealth, they excuse their conduct by pleading their families: and doubtless we ought to endeavour, that our children may be provided for, and enabled to maintain themselves, when we shall be taken from them.—But the desire of advancing them, much above our own station in the community, is injurious to them, both in respect to their temporal comfort, their character for prudence and good behaviour, and the interests of their immortal souls. How can any one greatly labour to enrich his children, if he do not himself idolize riches? How can he vindicate such an attempt, who believes the words of Christ: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." But a pious education, an edifying example, many fervent prayers offered by religious parents for their children and with them, and the little spared from superfluous expences to relieve the indigent, constitute a treasure of superior value: while habits of industry and frugality, the result of right principles, will, by the blessing of God, be far more advantageous than ungodly riches, inherited with the incumbrance of the crimes with which they have been acquired.

Neither can wealth enable a man to be useful to his friends and relatives, in any way or degree, that may be compared to the advantages derived from godliness. To be capable of conversing in a pious and prudent manner with our acquaintance; of exhibiting religion before them in an amiable example; of recommending them to the Lord in our daily supplications; and of using divers means to render them wise unto salvation; when accompanied with uniform endeavours to serve them in their temporal concerns, will render us far greater blessings to them than superior affluence could do.—And though men flatter themselves with the imagination, that they shall do much good, when they are grown rich: yet supposing the best, which rarely happens, the most liberal use of ungodly wealth, seldom compensates the effect of corrupt principles and a bad example thus varnished over. On the other hand, the godly man, however poor, is a light in his neighbourhood, and the salt of the earth. He restrains the vicious, encourages the drooping, promotes piety and righteousness, professes and adorns the gospel, and in all respects is a blessing to every village, city, or nation in which he resides. The Lord preserved all who sailed with Paul, in answer to his prayers: ten righteous persons would have preserved Sodom: and the Scripture fully warrants me to say, that our national preservation hitherto is vouchsafed in answer to the prayers, and for the sake of the pious remnant among us. In all respects, and in every view, "Godliness with contentment is great gain," yea the greatest of gains; "It is profitable for all things; having the promise of this life, and of that which is to come."

III. Then let us conclude with some practical instructions.

Many young persons being brought in the way of religion, think that godliness may be very proper in old age, as at that time of life people have little to do, and have no relish for juvenile pleasures. They perhaps allow

Digitized by Google

that it will sometime be needful *for them* also: but they wish to defer the distasteful task to a more convenient opportunity. In the meanwhile, they purpose making a trial of the world; being determined not to believe that all is vanity and vexation, unless convinced by experience. The opinion, therefore, that religion is irksome and joyless, proves in this case a most fatal delusion of Satan. All desire *present* satisfaction; and few are willing to forego it for a distant and invisible felicity. Hence arises a procrastination that generally proves fatal. But could we convince men that genuine piety would best promote their present satisfaction, one great obstruction to the gospel would be removed. You, my young friends, have doubtless found already, that disappointment and disgust often succeed to sanguine expectation: be persuaded therefore, we earnestly entreat you, to regard those, who have dearly bought their experience, when they declare that this will more and more be the case, as long as you seek that happiness in the world, which can only be found in God and religion. "Come" then, "taste and see, how gracious the Lord is; and how blessed they are that trust in him." Make a fair trial, whether peace of conscience, and joy in God, be not preferable to turbulent mirth, with an aching heart and bitter remorse.

But are not religious people often melancholy and uncomfortable? No doubt many who speak about religion, and live at open war with their convictions, are very miserable. Others, taking up distorted views of truth, and prematurely or disproportionately studying matters too deep for them, disquiet their minds, and cast a gloom over their piety: while negligence, unwatchfulness, evil tempers, or cleaving to worldly objects, will render those uneasy, who fear God or have any tenderness of conscience. But these effects arise not from godliness, but from the want of it; and they would vanish, were the Scriptures more implicitly believed and obeyed. We ought therefore to infer from these things, that we should carefully compare our religion with the word of God; and pray without ceasing, that we may be enabled to have our conversation as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps some of you, who have neglected godliness, meet with continual disapointment in your worldly pursuits. Does not the Lord then say to you, "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me—hear, and your soul shall live?" Few of the numerous candidates for wealth, honour, or power, are successful: and the most assiduous application has only the probability of success; but the unfailing word of God insures the blessing to all that seek his kingdom and righteousness in *the first place*, and in the way which he hath prescribed.

Are any of you who trust that you possess godliness, oppressed by poverty, sickness, or trouble? Seek after contentment, my brethen: seek divine peace and consolations with redoubled earnestness; and strive to serve God cheerfully in the humble duties of your station. Watch against envy and covetousness, and a repining disposition. Learn to pity such as have wealth without godliness, and to pray for them; and be very cautious what measures you adopt to mend your outward circumstances: "for they that will be rich fall into temptation, and into divers foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition,"—or "pierce them through with many sorrows." 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

Finally, let the rich remember that they are only stewards, and entrusted with wealth for the benefit of others. Let me charge you then, my brethren of superior degree, that "you trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God." That you be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, and glad to communicate; that you do good to all men, especially to the household of faith." Fear above all things having your portion in this life: and remember, that of all your possessions, nothing is *your own*, but godliness with contentment, and such things as accompany salvation. All else will soon be left behind. Happy then are they, and they only, who have chosen the good part that shall never be taken from them.

Digitized by Google

SERMON XI.

CHARACTER AND CRIMINALITY OF LUKEWARMNESS IN RELIGION.

REVELATION, III. 15, 16.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot; so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

THIS chapter, and that which precedes it, contain a message from our blessed Saviour to each of the seven churches in Asia; which, in one part or another, suit the state and character of all Christian churches whatever. As therefore they were intended for the use of other ages and nations, it is added at the close of each, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The message to the Laodiceans differs materially from all the rest; for the professed Christians in that city had degenerated far more than any of the others. They were become lukewarm, yet proud of their imagined proficiency: and the reproofs, warnings, and counsels of our Lord were adapted to this peculiarity of character and conduct.

We know that lukewarm water is exceedingly disagreeable: the stomach recoils at it, and we spit it out with loathing. Thus Christ declared that he would cast off the church of Laodicea with disdain and abhorrence. There might, however, be some individuals of a better character, though probably infected with the same disease: and others might be brought to repentance. For the sake of these, therefore, the message was sent: they were warned, rebuked, instructed, counselled, and encouraged; and we may hope that many derived special benefit. Yet the church at large seems to have degenerated more and more: so that, while those churches, which our Lord mentioned with approbation, continue in some poor remains to this very day, there has not for a long time been a single professed Christian at Laodicea!

Many commentators have thought, that these epistles are prophetical of seven distinct periods in the history of the church: but there seems no sufficient ground for this opinion. If, however, such an interpretation should be admitted, it must be feared, that this to Laodicea is descriptive of the present times; for we are unquestionably fallen very much into the same spirit. In prosecuting the subject, I purpose,

I. To describe the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness.

II. To explain the grounds of that decided abhorrence of it, which Christ expresses.

III. To add something by way of solemn warning and particular application.

I. Let us consider the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness, both in collective bodies, and individuals professing Christianity.

It may here be proper to premise one observation, to prevent mistakes. When our advantages, opportunities, and obligations are duly considered, we may all be justly charged with comparative lukewarmness; and the more

Digitized by Google

we become acquainted with ourselves, and experience the power of divine truth upon the heart, the keener will be our sensibility, and the deeper our abasement on this account. But this case is totally distinct from that of the allowed, and self-sufficient lukewarmness of the Laodiceans. Such characters alone, however, are immediately intended in our present inquiry: and it would be a very undesirable effect, if any humble believer, who longs to live more zealously devoted to the glory of God, should be discouraged by it; because he finds by experience, he "cannot do the things that he would."

The disease of which we speak is only found in the church and where some profession of religion is made: The irreligious world is not lukewarm. Persons of this description may say, 'we make no pretensions to piety or sanctity; we seldom think about religion; it is a subject that never gives us any concern.' Then indeed you are not chargeable with *lukewarmness;* you are clear of that crime: but if you pretend to no religion, what do you pretend to? Do you profess yourselves children of disobedience and of wrath, and heirs of hell? Is this your meaning, your character, or prospect? Whatever you may suppose, these things alone belong to those who avow that they disregard God and religion.

But leaving such men to their own reflections, we observe that lukewarmness pre-supposes the form and appearance of a church; and that possibly, neither very erroneous in doctrine nor corrupt in morals. In like manner the lukewarm individual may retain the form of sound doctrine, avoid gross vices, and continue in communion with some Christian society: he may even manage so well, that no specific charge can be substantiated against him; no foul spot be visible in his character; no proof brought that he has renounced his profession. He may observe in some measure all the forms of godliness; but he wants the spirit, life, and activity of religion. We cannot say that he is dead: yet he resembles a wounded man, for whom great fears are entertained, even while symptoms of life seem discernible.

Ministers, who are conversant with the state of their flocks, generally class people according to their apparent characters in their private judgment of them. Some are evidently in the broad way: others are thought more promising; at least they desire to be so esteemed. But among some favourable tokens, many things appear very exceptionable: we would hope the best; but "what meaneth this bleating of the sheep, and lowing of the oxen that we hear?" Something criminal or suspicious is observable in the shop or in the family; some duty is evidently neglected, or slightly performed; and this damps our fond expectations concerning them. Others are not wholly irreligious, nor is there any remarkable blemish in their conduct; but they are neither cold nor hot: they do not appear serious, active, or zealous; and therefore we grieve over them, and stand in doubt as to the event of their profession. But there are some of another description, who are our hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing: may God exceedingly increase the number of them!—These are the ornament and credit of the gospel; from them the light shines with efficacious splendour: and their bright example, with the energy of their influence and fruitfulness, counteracts the pernicious tendency of loose profession, to wound the interests of truth, and retard its progress.

But let us enumerate some particulars, in which lukewarmness especially discovers itself. This may be observed in the conduct of professors, as to the ordinances of public worship, and all the means of grace. The lively Christian says, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is: to see thy power and glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary: because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee." Hence you see him anticipating the opportunity of waiting upon God, as a man expects any season of pleasure and delight; and making preparation lest any thing should deprive him of the satisfaction he expects.

Digitized by Google

He suffers not a trivial hindrance to prevent his attendance on religious duties; and if he cannot break through intervening obstructions, he finds it difficult to bring his mind into a due resignation to the divine will. He does not inquire how often he is bound to attend at the house of God: but rather rejoices when opportunity offers on any day, which he can embrace consistently with other duties.

On the contrary, the lukewarm come reluctantly to the ordinances of divine worship; and are secretly pleased, when an excuse, deemed sufficient, is suggested for absenting themselves.—A visit or an invitation from a friend, some trivial business, a slight indisposition, or the inconvenience of unfavourable weather, are no unwelcome hindrances to their attendance at the house of God. The same also is observable in respect of the Lord's Supper, in which the lively Christian delights to commemorate the Redeemer's love, unless his mind has entertained some misconception about it. But such frivolous excuses, as keep the lukewarm from public worship, operate still more effectually, in leading him to absent himself from the Lord's table: unless it be a convenient part of that form, by which he maintains his credit, and quiets his conscience; for in other respects he regards it as a matter of indifference.

We may further observe, that lukewarm persons commonly consider the sermon as the principal object, and think little of joining with reverence and fervency in other parts of divine service. They commonly therefore come late to the places of worship, and disturb the devotions of such as are more zealous. They are also ready to say to ministers, "speak to us smooth things," 'discourse on soothing and consolatory topics; avoid awful and distinguishing subjects, and do not offend the audience with plain dealing.' Such persons are peculiarly attentive to the manner, the voice, and delivery of the preacher; if these be graceful and suited to their taste, they are more easily satisfied in other respects. Above all, they recommend brevity, 'Let the sermon be short, the prayer short, and make haste to dismiss us.' For they are soon weary of an employment, so little congenial to their prevailing disposition. They attend from custom, or amusement, or to pacify conscience; they delight not in the sacred service, and are reluctant to be "detained before the Lord." 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

But if this be the case as to public worship, what can be expected in respect of family religion? If this be not totally neglected, it is very superficially and irregularly conducted. Business, engagements, amusements, or visitants, easily induce the lukewarm to omit it entirely; or it is hurried over at an unseasonable hour, when perhaps several of the family are half asleep. Thus the souls of children and domestics are neglected: and every person of discernment and observation must be convinced, that, according to all human probability, the religion of such professors, whatever it be, will die with them. Indeed the families of the lukewarm have few advantages above those of the irreligious: while they are led to believe, that an evangelical creed will suffice to bring a worldly man to heavenly felicity.

Some of the puritan divines have observed, that 'apostacy begins in the closet:' and the same may certainly be said concerning lukewarmness: for even when our hearts are truly engaged in religion, we find it difficult to maintain habitual fervour and devotion in secret duties. It is therefore obvious to conclude, that they who are cold and formal in public and family worship, must be still more remiss in private. This, however, falls not under observation, but the lukewarm cannot but be conscious of it. Indeed the grand difficulty of the Christian course, consists in duly attending to self-examination, meditation, and secret devotion: our sharpest conflicts with Satan and our own hearts will generally be about these duties. While matters go well with us in this respect, we shall be carried through trials and services with comfort and advantage; but when we grow negligent in secret, our public conduct will after a time be less respectable and edifying. Yea, this is as it were the pulse of the soul, by which we may best judge whether it

Digitized by Google

be healthy or otherwise. So that the difference between a lukewarm and a zealous Christian must here be peculiarly observable to a man's own conscience.

The two characters may also be discriminated by the company which they prefer. Business or incidental circumstances may carry the most zealous believer into the society of worldly men: but he goes among them from a sense of duty; he is out of his element, and bears a cross all the while; and he feels a quick sensibility and a watchful jealousy, lest he should disgrace his profession, or sustain detriment from so incongenial an association.—When the necessity ceases, he consequently returns to the society of pious persons; and he habitually says with David, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy precepts."—But the lukewarm finds numerous pretences for visiting and loitering among ungodly associates, and for joining in some of their vain amusements. Their profane conversation or frivolous behaviour do not render them very uneasy: and it happens unfortunately that they have some objection or other against every one of their acquaintance, who is strictly religious.—This man, though pious, is uncourtly or unpleasant in his demeanour: the other on a certain occasion said an impertinent thing; and the third hath given just cause of offence. Thus they excuse themselves to their own consciences as well as to others, while they separate from the company of religious people: and in proportion they must more and more approximate to the spirit and maxims of their chosen companions.—They yield to solicitation in one instance, and then say, 'what harm in this?' They go a little further, and urge the same excuse. They plead for conformity to the world in one thing after another, till almost every trace of distinction vanishes; and then deem it a mark of a liberal mind to maintain no singularities, and not to thwart the humour of the company: till at length they often come within the immediate attraction of the whirlpool, and are swallowed up in it beyond recovery!

The lukewarm professor reverses likewise the maxims of the gospel, in the pursuit and use of worldly things. He *first* seeks prosperity or indulgence; and vainly hopes that the kingdom of God and his righteousness will be added to him, without any peculiar concern or exertion. If he can maintain a hope that he is *safe*; he has no regard for the honour of God, the interests of the gospel, the salvation of souls, or advancement in holiness. In order to maintain his confidence, he looks perhaps to some past experience of the power, which divine truth had on his heart and conscience; this he concluded at the time to be conversion; and he still endeavours to satisfy himself in the same manner; abusing some important doctrines of the gospel to support his hope, notwithstanding his present conduct. If attacked on this ground, he feels, and probably expresses, great displeasure; but on other subjects he is destitute of sensibility. On the other hand, the zealous Christian is very suspicious of himself, and bears patiently to have the ground of his confidence investigated! but he is ready to say on such occasions, 'Have I not said or done something, which counteracts my earnest desire to glorify God my Saviour, and recommend his gospel to my fellow-sinners? Have I not been betrayed into evil tempers, or inexpedient indulgences, which may give others an unfavourable opinion of my religious principles? Have I not mis-spent my time, and neglected to improve my talents? Have I avoided the appearance of evil, and taken care that my good should not be evil spoken of?' These are constant subjects of self-examination, and sources of humiliation to the zealous Christian, of which the lukewarm know scarcely any thing: for they seldom think of our Lord's words, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

It might be supposed that persons, so deficient as to the grand essentials of Christianity, could not enjoy much comfort in religion: yet they frequently exhibit the appearance of high assurance and abundant consolations: for every good thing may be counterfeited. There are ways, by which men

Digitized by Google

may conceal their lukewarmness even from themselves; and acquire a kind of intoxicating self-complacency. A man may be very zealous for some appendages of religion, while extremely languid about religion itself. He may contend earnestly for certain doctrines, or for some peculiarities of discipline and church government; and defend his sentiments with great ability and fervour. His boasting, reviling, and bitterness, are indeed additional proofs that he is little acquainted with genuine Christianity: yet the ardent zeal which he feels and expresses, in the cause of truth, as he supposes, enables him to conceal his real character from himself.

There are, however, some who deceive themselves in an opposite manner. They call their lukewarmness *candour*; they contend for no doctrine or peculiarity, and this is *moderation* in their use of words. Every sentiment is with them a matter of indifference: they allow every man without disturbance to hold his own opinion, hoping that all or most of them will be found right at the last; this they call *charity*, the principal grace of Christianity! But in fact such men do not value the truth, and they impose on themselves by fair pretexts, while they prefer ease, credit, and interest to the glory of God, and the cause of the gospel. The spirit of persecution is, in these lands, exceedingly abated, for which we have reason to bless the Lord; but it may be questioned, whether this affected and idolized indifference about divine truth be not an evil of almost equal enormity. This fashionable way of thinking dignifies lukewarmness with the name of candour, secures it from censure, and teaches a man to be a Christian without offending the bitterest enemies of Christianity! But are not such men ashamed of Christ and his words, in this corrupt and evil generation? and will he not be ashamed of them, when he shall come in glory to judge the quick and dead?

Rashness and imprudence are often manifested, in contending for the truth once delivered to the saints: but shall we on this account be silent and satisfied, when Christianity or its leading doctrines are denied and vilified? Is there no profession of the name and doctrine of Christ required from his disciples? Are the peculiar instructions of revelation become matters of no consequence with professed believers? Yet it may further be remarked, that these very *candid* men forget their placid moderation among zealous Christians; and frequently become warm, if not disdainful and bitter disputers against evangelical principles!

I shall only add one more peculiarity of the lukewarm professor, for the subject is almost inexhaustible. He is commonly distinguished by a proportionable measure of spiritual pride. Confident of his superior wisdom and attainments, he arrogates to himself, in almost every respect, the pre-eminence among his brethren. The apostle pointed out this symptom of the disease to the Corinthians, when he said, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." 1 Cor. iv. 7—10. Yet while they were thus puffed up, their glorying was not good; and the doctrinal and practical errors and evils, which had been sanctioned among them, were almost incredibly many and dreadful. The church at Laodicea also said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" which is the exact description of spiritual pride. So that this is one invariable symptom of lukewarmness, as well as a cause of its prevalence: for an high opinion of our attainments uniformly leads to something mean and grovelling, and "a haughty spirit goes before a fall."

II. Then we proceed to explain the reasons, for which our Lord expressed such marked abhorrence of lukewarmness.

When he said, "I would thou wert cold or hot; so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth:" we cannot suppose he meant that such professors were always more wicked,

Digitized by Google

or in greater danger of perdition, than apostates, or notorious profligates: though considering their advantages, obligations, and ingratitude, they may be often in fact more heinously criminal. I apprehend, however, that our Lord especially referred to the dishonour done by the lukewarm to his name, and the mischievous consequences of their infectious and disgraceful example.—Every one knows, that a bad servant may do ten times more mischief, while he remains in the family, than he could do were he dismissed from it; and in like manner lukewarm professors do far more harm to the cause of Christ, by pretending to religion, than they could do by openly renouncing Christianity. One Achan in the camp caused more trouble and loss to Israel, than all the hosts of the Canaanites: "Neither," says the Lord, "will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed thing from among you." Josh. vii.

Corrupt professors of Christianity have in all ages been the grand obstruction to its progress. Mr Brainerd, in the narrative of his mission among the Indians, observes, that he had great difficulty, for a long time, to erase from their minds a suspicion, that he had formed some design of injuring them, under a pretence of preaching the gospel: so frequently had they been defrauded by nominal Christians! This is the case, in one way or other, all over the globe: and the principal impediment to the success of the gospel in this land arises from the same cause. Lukewarm professors give irreligious people an unfavourable idea of evangelical doctrines. The prejudice against them is indeed naturally very strong, and men imagine they tend to licentiousness: but were there no loose characters among those that contend for these principles; were they all "a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" this objection would soon be silenced, and men would be ashamed of thus calumniating their conscientious neighbours. It is likewise well known, that we profess to experience joy and peace in believing; to find the ways of religion pleasant and delightful; and to choose rather to be "door-keepers in the house of the Lord, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness." 'All this,' say worldly people, 'sounds very well: yet these devout believers frequently come to borrow a little of our pleasure, and seem as intent as we are, in securing a portion of our good things.' How can such men be convinced, that there is superior excellency or satisfaction in religion, while they see us cleaving to the world, and reluctant to renounce what we affect to despise?

The lukewarm are also the bane of those, who have been newly impressed with a sense of divine things. Under the preaching of the gospel, thoughtless sinners are awakened to a concern about their eternal interests; their consciences become uneasy, and their minds attentive to instruction: they are convinced that many doctrines which once they disregarded are true and important, and perceive the necessity of renouncing sinful pursuits, and of separating from their old associates; and they become diligent in attending on the means of grace. But, if in this hopeful frame of mind they come in the way of lukewarm professors, whose strong attachment to certain truths, and plausible address, beguile their unexperienced hearts; they are easily seduced into false notions of *liberty*, not "in keeping God's commandments," but in disregarding them; and they gradually lose their tenderness of conscience, and diligence in "labouring for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life." They are now taught, that strictness in duty and self-denial deduct from the freeness of divine grace: and various insinuations of this kind poison their minds with prejudices against the ministers and Christians, among whom they were first excited to inquire after salvation. Thus numbers, who apparently set out well, by means of an unsuspecting attention to persons of this description, obtain a false peace, and finally settle among formal, disputatious, or antinomian professors. These are "the little foxes that spoil the vines" just when the tender grapes begin to be formed; and thus give most poignant grief to faithful pastors, while they witness, but cannot prevent, the perversion of those, who they hoped would be their rejoicing in the day of Christ.

Digitized by Google

But indeed the preachers of the gospel are themselves more exposed to temptation from the lukewarm, than from all other men whatever. We have like passions with our neighbours: and when we have forfeited the friendship of the world by adhering to the truths of the gospel; we are reluctant to meet also the frowns of religious people. Yet unless we stand firm against the insinuations of Laodicean professors, and venture their keen reproaches and calumnies, we shall not deliver much above half our message; we shall separate the practice from the doctrines of Christianity; and pass over, in general and inoffensive terms, those very subjects, which the state of our congregations require to be most fully and plainly enforced.—And as lukewarmness commonly prevails more among the wealthy than the poor, our danger is very great; for their favour is both agreeable and advantageous, and their disapprobation exposes us to serious inconveniences, and often threatens great distress. Thus ministers lie under strong temptations to shun "declaring the whole counsel of God," to "keep back some things profitable to the people," to speak softly and timidly, to call this prudence and candour; and perhaps to join in censuring such as are more faithful to God and the souls of men. Either such cases are not unfrequent in this metropolis, or I greatly mistake the meaning of the Scriptures, and that of the words and actions of mankind. We should, however, seriously consider the apostle's words, "If I were a man-pleaser, I should no longer be the servant of Jesus Christ."

In these and many other ways the lukewarm disgrace the gospel, and retard its progress: they weaken the hands, disconcert the measures, and even ruin the simplicity of the ministers of Christ; while they damp the ardour, or mislead the earnestness of real Christians. Can we therefore, any longer wonder at our Lord's decided language against such pernicious characters? Let us then,

III. Apply the subject, in solemn warnings and particular exhortations.

Our blessed Saviour seems to address himself to the Laodicean church to the following effect. 'Thy lukewarm spirit and conduct are so contrary to the design of my religion, and the obligations conferred on my disciples; so dishonourable to my name, and so injurious to mankind; that I am determined to give an awful lesson to all other churches, by casting thee off with contempt and abhorrence: I will therefore deprive thee of all thy abused privileges, and no longer leave thee the name or form of my holy religion.' In like manner, my friends, whenever any kingdom, city, church, or congregation becomes like the Laodiceans; it will surely and speedily be deprived of its religious advantages; the candlestick will be removed out of its place; and this will be accompanied with other tokens of divine indignation. Thus interpreted, the words are indeed awfully prophetical: and when lukewarmness becomes general in any church, however distinguished or denominated, it is a certain prognostic of approaching judgments, either spiritual or temporal.

But the application to individuals is more immediately the province of the preacher. We do not indeed say, that every person, infected with this disease, is an hypocrite, and will prove an apostate; but we affirm most constantly, *that the case is awfully dangerous.* "Let no man deceive you with vain words:" let none persuade you to consider this as a *legal* or a trifling matter. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." He has not only adopted a new creed; but he has received a new heart, and leads a new life: "he is created in Christ Jesus unto good works." How then can it be possible for a man to know that he is in Christ, unless he be conscious of this change, and manifest it in his whole disposition and conduct? Will any one say, he knows himself to be in a state of acceptance; because he has a strong impression that this is his privilege; because texts of Scripture were brought to his mind to assure him of it; and because he has had many comfortable

Digitized by Google

seasons under religious ordinances? If his spirit and practice do not at all accord to that of the Christian, as described in the oracles of God, ought he not to conclude, that "Satan, transformed into an angel of light," has deceived him: and that he builds upon the sand, by hearing the words of Christ, and not doing them? And how can he know, but that the storms and floods of death and judgment will sweep away his baseless edifice, with most tremendous destruction? They who call Christ Lord, and do not the things that he says; even if they perform many wonderful works in his name, and receive extraordinary gifts from him, will at the last day be bid to "depart as workers of iniquity:" and what will then become of their anti-scriptural confidence?

The tares and the wheat must grow together till the harvest; the wise and foolish virgins will form one company till the coming of the Bridegroom; and guests who have not the wedding garment may remain unnoticed, till the King come to see them; but the final discrimination, with its eternal consequences, will be dreadful to those, who had a name to live, and yet were dead.

Supposing, however, a man's lukewarmness not fatal; yet the uncertainty and the apparent danger of his condition are sufficient to excite great alarm and distress. If he be saved, it will be "as by fire:" and what a gloomy prospect, what terrors and remorse upon a death-bed, are before him? These are the only tokens for good, of which his case can admit: for unshaken confidence at the hour of death, succeeding an evidently lukewarm profession, proves that a man is given over to a strong delusion. Remember then, and may the Lord impress it deeply on every heart! that consternation and anguish, when death approaches, form the brightest prospect of the lukewarm Christian! And is this the provision you are making for that awful crisis? Is this your intention when you yield to indolence, temptation, and the seduction of bad examples?

You may probably, my brethren, censure my address as harsh and severe; but I hope you will observe, that it is far below the energy of reproof and warning, employed by the loving Saviour himself: yet he spake to those, among whom some persons seem to have had a few feeble sparks of grace, as fire covered and almost extinguished by the ashes.

But some perhaps continue to quiet their minds, by thinking that they make no pretensions to religion, and are not therefore concerned in the rebuke. Let me, however, demand of you, whether you have not been baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Have you then openly renounced your baptism, and abjured Christianity? Or do you expect to be called Christians?—If you do, this implies a profession of religion, however unmeaning and hypocritical: and your indifference about these subjects proves you the most lukewarm of all that bear the name of Christ. And is this your confidence? or do you intend to plead this before the tribunal of your Judge? Would not such an excuse then prove before men and angels, that you had crucified Christ afresh, and put him to open shame; and that you had done despite to the Spirit of Grace, by a course of conduct diametrically opposite to the religion which you professed?

Should these solemn reflections excite any of you seriously to inquire, what you ought to do? The answer is obvious. Consider the salvation of your souls as your grand concern: forego or postpone all other pursuits, rather than suffer them to retard your course in seeking an interest in the Saviour of sinners. Be diligent, earnest, and persevering in attendance on all the means of grace. Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance: separate from the world with all its sensual pleasures, and stupifying dissipations: and seek your present happiness, as well as future safety, in the favour and service of our gracious God and Father.

If you doubt whether all this be necessary, I appeal to the Law and to the Testimony. Search the Scriptures: see whether they do not require us to give the Lord our hearts and devote ourselves entirely to him, and whether

Digitized by Google

the language of Christ, concerning self-denial, renouncing the world, enduring the cross, labouring and striving to enter in at the strait gate, be not much stronger than any thing here stated. If any of you should not be able to reconcile these passages to your views of salvation by grace; be assured that your views are unscriptural; and beg of God to open your understanding, that you may more clearly discern the truth as it is in Jesus. But beware of indolence and partiality in reading the Scriptures; do not select a few passages: and pass over the rest, as unsuitable to your system, or uninteresting to you; for this springs from lukewarmness, and tends to its rapid increase.

But are any of you convinced, that you have hitherto been infected with this Laodicean spirit, and almost ready to tremble for the consequences? Let me call your attention to the subsequent part of our Lord's address to such lukewarm professors. He condescends to say even to them, "I counsel thee to buy of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent."

Think then frequently and intensely on eternity and its infinite importance: meditate seriously on the death of Christ; the design, manner, causes, and effects of it; the instructions conveyed, and the obligations conferred by that great event. Pray earnestly for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can prevent or cure lukewarmness, and maintain the life and power of godliness in the soul. Examine particularly every part of your disposition and conduct: be willing to know the whole of your case as it really is. Withdraw from the company of the lukewarm, and associate with zealous Christians: and never admit a doubt, but that the more fervent, diligent, and fruitful you become, the greater will be your peace and comfort in life and death, and the more abundant your gracious recompence in the realms of blessedness.

We have all of us, my brethren, considerable cause for humiliation in this matter: and have need to redouble our diligence in using all these means, that we may make progress, and grow in grace. But while the Lord says to all, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me:" he adds for the encouragement of those who are fighting the good fight of faith, perhaps with conscious feebleness and many fears, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne. He then that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

SERMON XII.

CHRISTIANITY RECOMMENDED BY AN EXEMPLARY CONDUCT.

MATTHEW, v. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Our blessed Lord, just before his ascension into heaven, thus addressed his apostles; "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of

Digitized by Google

the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Hence we learn that there is a kind and measure of instruction which precedes an intelligent profession of the gospel, comprising the first principles of the doctrine of Christ: and that there is also a more particular and exact instruction, by which ministers should endeavour to form the judgment, and direct the conduct of believers, in all the several parts of Christianity. This distinction ought to be carefully remembered; that we may not suppose, the practical exhortations given to believers supersede the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith in the Son of God, as numbers seem to think; nor yet deem it inconsistent with the purest evangelical views, to explain particularly and inculcate most earnestly, the several parts of our duty to God and to our neighbour.

In the sermon on the mount, our Lord first shewed in the several beatitudes, that happiness results from the state of the heart, and not from external circumstances: and then addressing the disciples, in the presence of the multitude, he said, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." Christians scattered over the earth, ought to communicate a purifying savour of piety and righteousness, and thus to prevent the increasing depravity of the human race: but graceless preachers and professors of the gospel are the vilest and most hopeless of men. "Ye are," says Christ, "the light of the world; a city set upon an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house." True Christians, placed in different families, villages, streets, cities, and nations, diffuse the light of divine truth, received from the Sun of righteousness, throughout the world. This also renders them conspicuous: their dispositions, words, and actions, will surely be observed and exactly scrutinized. Nor were they enlightened from above, in order to be immured in cloisters, or to retire into deserts, like lamps put under a bushel; but it is the Lord's will, that they should resemble candles placed on candlesticks in the midst of a room, to give light to every part of it. Therefore "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It may be proper for us,

I. To consider the persons, to whom this exhortation is especially addressed.

II. To examine more fully its import. And,

III. To state the object which we should aim at in complying with it.

I. The persons to whom the words are especially addressed.

Some expositors seem to confine the exhortation to the apostles; or to the ministers of the gospel exclusively. But though the words are peculiarly proper and energetic in this application; yet it is evident that all Christians are, in their own circle and measure, "lights in the world;" and all who profess Christianity, may be exhorted to act consistently with their avowed character. In other parts of Scripture similar exhortations are addressed to believers in general. The evangelical prophet viewing the church as a disconsolate female sitting in darkness upon the ground, thus encourages her, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the earth; and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be upon thee: and Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Isaiah lx. 1—3. When the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ, illuminates the church; then she arises from the dust, reflects the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness, and shines as a light to the Gentiles. The preached gospel is sent "to give light to them that sit in darkness, and the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of

Digitized by Google

peace:" "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:" and when these effects are produced, men "are made the children of light and of the day," and are exhorted to a becoming deportment. Luke i. 78, 79. Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. v. 8—14. St Paul addresses the Philippians in words very similar to those of the text: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine, (or shine ye,) as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." And St Peter uses language to the same effect: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Phil. ii. 14, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

But we need not multiply proofs in so plain a case. The apostles derived a primary splendour from Christ, the Light of the world; and their shone before vast multitudes with peculiar lustre. The ordinary pastor diffuses the same light in his circle, and according to his measure: and the meanest Christian has his little influence, and a few observers, among whom too his light may be made to shine. Even nominal Christians, being favoured with the light of truth, are inexcuseable, in proportion to their advantages, in not receiving and communicating the inestimable benefit. For "this is the condemnation, that Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." John iii. 16—21.

This may suffice to shew, that we are all concerned in the exhortation: for in our favoured land, and our peculiar situation, we have every advantage for aiming to "let our light shine before men:" and if we do not, "we have no cloak for our sin:" so that it will be more tolerable, in the day of judgment, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for us.

II. We will then examine more fully the import of the exhortation.

God hath made other men his instruments in communicating to us the light of the gospel: and we should desire and endeavour to impart the benefit to others also: though we seem rather lamps in the street, or candles in the room, than luminaries in the firmament of heaven. The means to be used for this purpose may vary, according to our several employments, abilities, and relations in life: but we all ought to have the same habitual design of bringing our neighbours and friends to the knowledge of God and themselves; the holy law and the gospel of salvation; the way of peace and the path of duty; and all other things which pertain to evangelical piety.

In order to accomplish this purpose, it is requisite that we make an explicit profession of our faith; that it may be understood what doctrines we believe, on what foundation our hopes are builded, and what we think concerning the person and redemption of Christ. We ought to avow our expectations from him, and obligations to him; that it may be perceived on what account we deem ourselves bound to love him more than our greatest secular interests, or our dearest earthly friends: and unreservedly to keep his commandments. This profession is absolutely necessary to evince the sincerity of our faith: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. x. 10. And "Whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of man, and of his words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also will he be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of the Father with the holy angels." Mark viii. 38.

This profession is thus indispensably demanded of Christ's disciples, in order that they may "let their light shine before men," and diffuse the knowledge of divine truth in the world; without yielding to the dread of shame, reproach, or the most cruel persecution. It is not indeed expedient forwardly to declare our peculiar sentiments, in all places and companies, without some special reason, or favourable opening: but if regard to charac-

Digitized by Google

ter, or other secular motive render men so reserved in this matter, that their neighbours, friends, and relations remain, in a great measure, strangers to their religious principles, their sincerity may well be questioned: for this is a direct refusal to render to the Lord the glory due to his name, and to recommend his holy religion to mankind. And even if their conduct in some respects be suited to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, the observers are left to ascribe it to other causes, and thus an opportunity is lost of evincing the excellent tendency of evangelical truth.

This profession of our faith should especially be made, by attending on the ordinances of God, according to the directions of his holy word: and this also forms an important method of "letting our light shine before men." In the primitive times, when a Jew or Gentile began to attend on the preaching of the gospel; and when, professing "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," he was admitted by baptism into the visible church; when he associated habitually with Christians, statedly joined in their public worship, and commemorated the love and sufferings of Christ at his table; he avowed himself the servant of the one living and true God, and the disciple of the only-begotten Son of God. This conduct would be fully understood by his former companions, and he might expect contempt, reproach, or persecution as the consequence. We indeed live at a time, when most men in our land choose to be called Christians; and such a variety of discordant opinions are maintained by the professed disciples of Jesus: that the mere circumstance of attending public worship is no explicit avowal of our peculiar religious sentiments. But it is known that in some places, the mystery of the Trinity, the perfections of God's character, the righteousness of his law and government, and the wisdom and sovereignty of his providence are maintained. Connected with these doctrines, man's accountableness to his Creator and Governor, a future judgment, and a state of eternal retributions; the fallen condition of the human race, the evil and desert of sin, the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, and his free mercy in their salvation, are strenuously insisted on: and the person, redemption, and mediation of Emmanuel, Jesus the Son of God; regeneration and renewal unto holiness by the Spirit; repentance and fruits meet for repentance; justification by faith alone; love to the Saviour constraining to devoted obedience; and patient continuance in well-doing, animated by the hope of eternal glory, are the principal topics to which the attention of the auditories are called. These things are evidently enlarged upon in some congregations, and not in others; and if a man be convinced that they are the doctrines of Scripture, he ought seriously and statedly to attend at some place of worship answering to this description; avowing that his conduct is the result of examination, conviction, and regard to the authority of God. In doing this, not only hearing the sermons, but joining in every part of the service with reverent devotion, and associating with those who hold and adorn the same principles, he will make a very distinct and intelligible profession of his faith: and in bringing his family and others whom he can influence, to attend on the same ordinances: he may "let his light shine before men," and exhibit an edifying example to his neighbours. To render this the more impressive, he should not only appropriate the Lord's day to this purpose; but embrace opportunities of attending on any day when it does not interfere with his other duties: coming early, and shewing in his whole deportment, that he takes delight in the worship of God and in hearing his word. Such a conduct tends exceedingly to draw men's attention to the gospel, and to promote vital godliness in the world.

It may further be observed, that all these ends are more decidedly answered, when the believer, after mature deliberation, statedly attends at the same place of worship, than when he wanders from one to another: for thus he sets an example of constancy in his attachments to the truths and ordinances of God; and he more effectually insures the attendance of his family. Perhaps it may be added, that this conduct indicates a more healthful state

Digitized by Google

of soul, and best promotes the growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our light should also shine before men, by instructive and pious conversation. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment:" and it is remarkable, that the most opposite effects are ascribed to the tongue in the Sacred Scriptures. The Psalmist calls it "his glory:" and Solomon declares, that "the mouth of a righteous man is a well of life;" "the tongue of the just is as choice silver:" "the lips of the wise feed many;" and that "the tongue of the wise is health."

On the other hand, "The tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison:—it is a fire, a world of iniquity;—it setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." James iii. The fact is indeed undeniable, that the gift of speech, when abused, is the grand instrument in the propagation of atheism, infidelity, impiety, blasphemy, heresy, licentiousness, discord, and every other evil, through private circles and large communities, all over the earth. Yet this same gift, under the influence of divine teaching and holy affections, is also principally instrumental, in diffusing the light of the gospel among mankind: not only by public preaching, but by the private instructions of parents and masters, and by familiar conversation. The speech of prudent zealous Christians, being "seasoned with salt," pure, pious, and affectionate, "ministers grace unto the hearers." It is therefore emphatically true, that "life and death are in the power of the tongue; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If then we be the disciples of Christ, and partakers of his grace, we shall, after his example, "from the good treasure of our hearts bring forth good things." For even if we keep our mouth, as it were with a bridle, from all corrupt discourse, but do not embrace opportunities of profitable conversation; we shall be found guilty of burying our talent in the earth.

All indeed have not the gift of properly introducing religious topics in mixed companies, where they are too generally unwelcome, however prudently and seasonably managed: but every man has a little circle, in which he may speak with freedom on the great concern of salvation. Most persons have relatives, and many have families, among whom they are peculiarly bound to communicate the knowledge of the gospel. There are also seasons, in which almost any one will endure the serious and affectionate introduction of religious subjects; especially in times of peculiar affliction, or when death hath visited his house. In some companies a man is, as it were by common consent, called to take the lead in discourse, and may select his subject: and in most situations some opening will be found for a serious remark, which may be afterwards recollected, if it do not at the time introduce further conversation. The event of such reflections frequently give us reason to say, "a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" And upon careful examination it will be found, that far more good is done in this way, than is in general supposed.

An objection, however, will naturally arise in the mind of many, from the consideration of the aversion and contempt commonly expressed for this kind of conversation. But it is certain, that the rules prescribed by the Lord himself to his people, could not be reduced to practice, without exciting the same disgust and reproach. Deut. vi. 6—9. xi. 18—21. Even the conduct of Christ must be involved in the same censure: for he hath set us an example of this duty, and also of the manner in which it ought to be performed. In fact, the opposition of men, who have no habitual seriousness in religion, rather recommends, than forms an objection to pious discourse: and surely we ought not to neglect any part of our duty from that "fear of man which bringeth a snare!" Thus saith the Lord, "hearken unto me, my people, who know righteousness, in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings; for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them as wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation." Isaiah li. 7, 8.

Digitized by Google

They, who timidly and cautiously keep silence on these subjects, who leave men in ignorance and under delusion even among their own acquaintance, and make no effort to enlighten them with saving truth, lest they should be censured and stigmatised with some reproachful name, must act in direct contradiction to this solemn admonition. Whereas a prudent and suitable attention to this duty forms one of the most efficacious means of diffusing the savour of truth and piety, in families and neighbourhoods; and of opening a door of usefulness to those who labour in the word and doctrines.

There are indeed many vain talkers, who disgrace the gospel; disregarding relative duties, and every rule of propriety, by an ostentatious zeal and officious boldness in disputing about doctrines; while it is often too plain that the truth has little sanctifying effect upon their own hearts. It is therefore peculiarly incumbent upon us to ask wisdom of God, in order to a right performance of this duty; and to be very careful that our religious discourse be recommended by the ornament of a consistent behaviour in all other respects. This is especially the way to "let our light shine before men." Thus Peter, exhorting Christians to "have their conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they spake against them as evil doers, they might by their good works, which they should behold, glorify God in the day of visitation," inculcates the duties of subjects to their rulers; "for," says he, "so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He then states the duties of servants, even to severe and froward masters; adding, "for what glory is it," (what proof of grace or recommendation of the gospel,) "if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? But if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto ye were called." Afterwards he exhorts "wives to be in subjection to their own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives. And having mentioned some other subjects, he thus concludes the exhortation, "Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." 1 Pet. ii. iii.

In like manner, magistrates, masters, husbands, parents, children, and all others, have various relative duties to perform for the common benefit; and if they be known to profess the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which are generally accused of tending to laxity of morals, their conduct will be severely and minutely scrutinised. But when believers study to understand, and aim to practise the duties of their several relations, in all respects more exactly than before; when they habitually give up their own humour, interest, or indulgence, provided conscience be not concerned, to oblige and serve those that are most prejudiced and unkind; and when this conduct is adhered to with meek perseverance, notwithstanding discouragements and ungrateful returns: then the excellency of evangelical religion is exhibited in the clearest and most affecting light. In this manner we ought to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

A conscientious exactness, as to every part of our conduct in the ordinary transactions of life, is likewise indispensably necessary: that they may be conducted with the strictest integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality. We ought to "let our moderation be known unto all men;" it should be evident, "that our conversation is without covetousness;" and nothing ambiguous or suspicious should be observable in any of our dealings. A harmless and inoffensive deportment also is peculiarly necessary: we ought to keep at a distance from intermeddling in other men's affairs; from slander and discord; and from every word and action, which may prove injurious to the interest, peace, reputation, relative comfort, or ease of any other person; as far as this can be done consistently with other duties.

An evident disposition to kindness, benevolence, and compassion, is another ornament, and recommendation to the gospel. Nor is affluence, or extensive liberality requisite in order to diffuse this benign light around us;

Digitized by Google

provided our exertions bear some proportion to our ability. A loving spirit may be manifested in a narrow sphere, by a continual attention to little incidents, and by such beneficial actions, as are within the power of every man, whose heart is properly disposed.

These tempers ought to be associated with forbearance and gentleness under insults and injuries, a readiness to forgive repeated and most trying provocations, and a persevering endeavour to overcome evil with good." And when the believer is also willing to acknowledge, without reserve, the mistakes and faults, into which he hath been betrayed; and to make suitable concessions and amends to all, whom he hath in any respect offended; "his light shines before men" in a very resplendent manner. Patience and resignation also in those trying circumstances, which excite others to peevishness and rebellious murmurs; cheerful contentment at a distance from those pleasures, which most men deem the solace of life; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful; indifference about distinctions, pre-eminence, or applause; and discretion in the mangement of secular affairs, contribute to recommend, and consequently to diffuse the light of divine truth.—This is more especially the effect of a diligent improvement of our talents, according to our rank in life, or our situation in the church; by employing wealth, authority, influence, genius, learning and every endowment, with a steady aim to promote the cause of true religion in the world, and to render mankind, wiser, holier, and happier, by every means we can devise.

By a combination of these dispositions, and an habitual regard to every part of our conduct, according to the brief hints here given; avoiding extremes, rashness, harshness, and affected singularity; endeavouring to unite a courteous, obliging behaviour with religious constancy and fortitude; and studying the proprieties of our several stations, we may, I apprehend, comply with our Lord's exhortation, and "let our light shine before men."

III. Then we proceed to consider the object, which we ought to propose to ourselves, in attending to these duties.

It hath been hinted, that our light should shine *before men*, and not at a distance from human society. They, who quit the active scenes of life to which providence has called them, that they may cultivate piety in privacy and retirement, too much resemble such soldiers, as decline the combat, and refuse to face danger or endure hardship in the service of their country. Some employments indeed are absolutely irreconcileable with a good conscience: but when this is not the case, it is generally the believer's duty to "abide in his calling." Christianity suffices to teach every man, from the monarch to the slave, how to glorify God and serve his generation, by a diligent and self-denying performance of the duties belonging to his station. And this is the best method of exhibiting before men the nature and efficacy of that remedy, which God hath devised for the disorders of this evil world.

Our Lord in this same sermon warns his disciples not to do their "works to be seen of men:" yet here he requires them to "let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works." Our actions, however good in themselves, are corrupt in their principle, if they spring from vain-glory, or are made known with ostentation, as if we sought human applause. But if we abound in the fruits of righteousness, and patiently continue in well-doing, it will be impossible that our good works should be wholly concealed. "Our Lord went about doing good;" and he always shunned human observation, in his constant exercise of beneficence, as far as his circumstances would admit of it: yet his love and power were undeniable, and his fame spread abroad through the adjacent regions. Indeed alms-giving, prayer, and fasting, of which Christ spake afterwards, generally demand secrecy: but hypocrites especially seek glory by openly performing them: while the habitual tenor of a sober, righteous, and godly life, must be visible to those among whom we reside. Yet even here we ought to watch against every degree of ostentation.—But there

Digitized by Google

ns, in which the honour of God, and the edification of our require us to make known even those parts of our conduct, in general be concealed. Thus Daniel opened his windows, ree times a day, as a protest against the impious decree of the primitive Christians publicly sold their estates, to provide y. And thus martyrs in prison, or at the stake, prayed singly in the m[illegible] open manner, though at other times accustomed to retire into a closet.

The object which we are instructed to propose to ourselves, in making our "light shine before men," is this, "that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven:" and our conduct may be regulated in most cases, by carefully examining how that end may be most effectually attained. But so far from our good works conducing *in any degree* to our justification before God, even the gracious recompence, promised to the fruits of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers, is not so much as mentioned in the passage before us. Higher and nobler motives are exclusively proposed, motives in which self-love is allowed no gratification, except we can find pleasure in glorifying God and doing good to men.

The people of the world have in general a very unfavourable opinion of evangelical doctrines. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; and the plan of redemption seems to many of them irrational, inconsistent, calculated to level all distinctions of character and capacity, and to militate against the interests of morality and science. They therefore commonly entertain a contempt for a man's understanding, when they discover that he has zealously embraced this religious system: and the disgusting conduct, or extravagant notions of too many professors confirm these fatal prejudices, and furnish them with anecdotes and objections, with which to oppose the truth.—But when a man soberly avows his belief of the gospel; and "is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear:" when he discourses rationally on other subjects, and behaves with increasing propriety and consistency in all his various relations and engagements; the prejudices of observers gradually subside, and they begin to allow that his principles are not so intolerable as they once conceived them to be. Finding, that, while he decidedly resolves "to obey God rather than man," he also is ready to serve or oblige others when he can do it with a good conscience; and that his conduct when most exactly scrutinized, appears to the greatest advantage; and feeling perhaps that their own interest and comfort have been materially advanced by the change; they are prepared to receive more favourably any hint he may drop concerning the salvation of Christ; to read a book that he earnestly recommends, or to give the preachers of the gospel an occasional hearing. Thus many are led to an acquaintance with the truths of Christianity in the most attractive manner: their aversion and contempt are almost imperceptibly removed; and one after another is brought to the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his blood. Then a new light is set up to shine before men, that others may see his good works also, and be won over to join in glorifying our God and Father.

The Lord alone, it is true, can open the understanding and change the heart: but he almost always uses means and instruments; and the pious example and zealous endeavours of Christians are blessed to the conversion of sinners, as well as the preaching of the gospel. Every believer therefore should habitually design and endeavour to be useful in this manner, within his proper sphere; and propose it to himself as the grand object of his future life, to which all other pursuits ought to be subordinated, and if possible rendered subservient. He should watch over his tempers, words, and actions; and endeavour to regulate them in such a manner, that they may give the utmost energy to his attempts, to recommend the gospel to his family and acquaintance. It should be his constant aim, to strengthen the hands of faithful ministers; and to shew in his own conduct, the reality, excellency, and beauty of pure religion, and its tendency to render men happy and useful.

Digitized by Google

When this is carefully and generally attended to, the number of real Christians will commonly be multiplied, the light of life will be more widely diffused; and the grain of mustard-seed will become a large plant.

We cannot reflect seriously on this subject, without lamenting that there are but few Christians, even in nations professing Christianity.—The man who habitually hears an express command of Christ with contemptuous neglect, cannot reasonably expect to be thought his true disciple; yet who can deny that immense multitudes of professed Christians do thus treat the exhortation contained in the text?—Let none then be offended with us, for distinguishing between true believers, and those who say to Christ, Lord, Lord, but do not the things which he commands: for as he will shortly come, and make a complete and final separation, it is of the utmost consequence to every one, that he learn his real character and condition, before the door of mercy and hope be for ever shut against him.

Let each individual, therefore, seriously and impartially inquire, whether he hath that inward evidence of having believed and obeyed the gospel, which arises from a fervent desire that God may be glorified in the conversion of sinners, and from an uniform endeavour to "let his light shine before men," for that purpose. If this be wholly wanting, the most exact creed, and the strictest form of godliness will prove entirely unavailing. The Judge, at his appearance, will silence all such pleas, by saying with awful indignation, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." In proportion as we are doubtful, whether this be indeed the ruling principle of our hearts, and the plan of our lives, we should question whether our faith be living, and our hope warranted. We are, however, invited to come to Christ, as sinners for salvation, whatever our state and character may have hitherto been: and if we really accept of this invitation, "giving diligence to make our calling and election sure;" the subsequent change will constitute a "witness in ourselves," that we are partakers of Christ, and that his Spirit dwelleth in us.

Finally, my Christian brethren, we all need to be deeply humbled, that we have not "let our light shine before men," in that measure, and to that effect, which our peculiar advantages and obligations rendered incumbent on us. Let us then confess and lament our unfruitfulness: and while we humbly crave forgiveness of the past, let us earnestly beseech the Lord for a larger measure of his grace; that we may henceforth "walk more worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory."

Digitized by Google

SERMON XIII.

INEFFICACY OF HEARING WITHOUT PRACTISING THE WORD.

JAMES, I. 22—25.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

THE apostle James seems to have especially intended his epistle, as an antidote to the delusion of those who abused the doctrines of grace; and, expecting salvation by a dead or notional faith, considered good works as altogether superfluous. This may account for the remarkable difference which there is between his language and that of St. Paul; who was chiefly employed in contending against those that were prone to the opposite extreme. Having therefore shown that temptations and sins must not be ascribed to God, the unchangeable giver of every good and perfect gift; and observed that the word of truth is especially made use of, in regenerating sinners, and rendering them willing to consecrate themselves unto God: he gives some directions concerning the dispositions and manner, in which men should hear and receive the divine message, that it may be "in them an engrafted word, able to save their souls." He then introduces the passage, which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation, and concludes with these remarkable words; "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart: this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The religion which God approves, when viewed apart from the principles whence it springs, and the ordinances through which it is produced and maintained, is principally expressed by self-denying acts of kindness to men for the Lord's sake, and separation from all the pollutions of this evil world. "Now," says Paul, "abideth faith, hope, and charity; but the greatest of these is charity."

The text viewed in this connection, may give us an opportunity of considering,

I. The peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently designed to answer.

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising, to accomplish any of these purposes.

III. The nature, and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

IV. The contrast here stated betwixt the mere hearer, and the practical student of Scripture.

I. We consider the peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

Digitized by Google

"The Lord made all things for himself," that in different ways they might manifest his glory. The inanimate creation, in every part, proclaims, as it were his wisdom, power, and goodness, and demonstrates his being and perfections.—"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Each of the animal tribes answers the end of its creation, and enjoys all the felicity of which it is capable, except as involved in the consequences of our sins. But rational creatures should glorify their Maker in a higher manner; being formed capable of understanding the display he hath given of himself in his works, and of rendering him the reasonable service of adoration and obedience: in which, as connected with the ineffable enjoyment of his love, their genuine felicity consists. Yet, without at all considering the difference observable in men's character, it is undeniable, that all "have forsaken the fountain of living waters; and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." This is the universal apostacy and idolatry of the human race: they are all "alienated from the life of God." None seek their happiness in knowing, loving, obeying, and worshipping him; but all, if left to themselves, idolize the creatures, and expect felicity from the possession and enjoyment of them. It might easily be shewn that this is the prolific source of all the vices and miseries of mankind, however varied and multiplied. The idolized objects of their several pursuits are unsuitable and insufficient for their happiness; moderate possession and use give not the expected satisfaction; and hence spring intemperance and licentiousness, with all their dire effects. The devotees of riches, power, fame, or pleasure, become rivals, and interfere with each other: thus their malignant passions are excited, and they are tempted to most destructive and atrocious crimes. The departure from God makes way likewise for rebellion, enmity to his perfections and government, and direct opposition to his commands and cause: and hence spring impiety, infidelity, atheism, superstition, every species of false religion, and every form of virulent persecution.

Thus man hath forfeited his felicity in the favour of God, incurred his awful displeasure, lost his own capacity of enjoying a happiness adequate to his desires, and rendered himself the slave of the vilest affections. And as happiness is in its own nature one and unchangeable; he could by no means have avoided the most dreadful miseries, during the whole of his existence, had not his offended God brought *life*, as well as immortality, to light by the gospel.

It is therefore the especial intent of revelation, to make the one living and true God known to his apostate creatures, in the mysteries and perfections of his nature, as far as necessary; in the righteousness of his law and government; and in his readiness to show mercy and confer happiness even on rebellious man. It was evidently the design of the Lord to bring us back to himself; to provide for the pardon of our sins, and to give us a title to eternal life, in a way honourable to his perfections; to reduce us to a proper disposition of mind, that we might apply for these blessings in a suitable manner, and make due returns for them: to effect a cordial reconciliation between himself, the great and glorious Creator, and us rebellious creatures; and to teach us to love, reverence, worship and obey him, that, being renewed to his holy image, we might enjoy true happiness for evermore in his favour and service.

Revelation was also intended to train up a people, who might be the instruments of God in promoting his cause among men; in alleviating and counteracting the miseries and mischiefs of the world; and in doing good to one another, till their removal to a state of perfect holiness and felicity. Finally, it was designed to bring fallen men to that blessed state: that being made equal with the angels, they might for ever unite with them in the most sublime worship and delightful service of their infinitely glorious Benefactor.

Digitized by Google

Now if these are the special ends and purposes of revelation, as every impartial and diligent inquirer must be convinced they are; we may readily see,

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising to accomplish any one of them.

But the importance of the subject is inexpressible, and demands a more particular investigation. The apostle supposes in the text, that the persons he addressed did hear the *word of truth*, and not any species of false doctrine; for the more deeply men are impressed by erroneous sentiments, and the more entirely these become practical principles, the greater mischief is done; as such deluded persons are inflated with pride, buoyed up in self-confidence, and encouraged in gratifying their corrupt passions as a part of their religion. These are the produce of the tares, which the enemy sows in the field while the servants sleep: but the self-deceivers, that abound even where the good seed is sown, are such hearers as receive the doctrine of truth into a carnal mind by a dead faith, and distort or pervert it through the artifice of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts.—Our present business therefore lies with those, who statedly, or occasionally attend on the real gospel of Christ.

It may here be proper to make a digression, in order to mention some descriptions of *hearers only, and not doers;* that we may hold the mirror to every individual, and help him to discover what manner of man he is. Many persons form a part of our congregations, who come from habit or constraint. Children or domestics, belonging to religious families, and many others in different situations, are accustomed to attend divine service, where the word of truth is preached. They know this is expected from them: and they submit to it as a stated tax on their inclinations, which they pay for the sake of *coincident* advantages. Such persons commonly forget that *they* are addressed by the preacher, and concerned in his instructions. They come and go, as it were, mechanically; but scarcely think of complying with the exhortations which are most earnestly enforced. They receive the seed by the way-side, and "the devil takes it away, lest they should believe and be saved."—If this observation should reach the ears of any persons who answer the above description: let them remember, that for once at least they were particularly addressed; that the subject comes home to their case; and that not only the preacher, but the apostle speaks to them, as by name, saying, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

There are likewise *speculating* hearers, who study religion, as other men do mathematics; either to gratify curiosity and love of discovery; or because they hope to render it subservient to worldly interest and reputation; or vainly imagine that a sound creed is the one thing needful, the sure and the only passport to heaven. These men are often very severe on blind Pharisees, who think to be saved by a *form of godliness:* but they cannot see that a *form of knowledge* is equally worthless, and far more dangerous; because it produces a more desperate kind of pride and self-preference,—"knowledge puffeth up." They consider hearing, speculating, disputing; and criticising preachers and doctrines, as the whole of religion. Their notions abide inactive in their minds, and produce no change of disposition; even the apparent morality or piety, which are sometimes connected with them, result from other principles; while the spirit and conduct, in many respects, are diametrically opposite to the real tendency of the doctrines for which they contend. Such persons, however, seldom persevere in stated attendance, where the *whole* truth is preached; and as the completion of their system is the main object with them; they often grow weary of hearing even that partial statement, which they approve, and which they have fully understood.

Another description of hearers mistake *the means of becoming religious for religion.* They hear several sermons every week, from their favourite

Digitized by Google

preachers. though perhaps they scarcely understand, and never bestow any pains to remember and practice what they learn. Sometimes these persons ground their confidence on attending such ministers as are noted for distinguishing faithfulness; and, as they manage to endure this plain-dealing, they suppose themselves approved: for they understand that many hypocrites are offended by it. But at the same time, they never seriously think of examining themselves by the doctrine, or of following the exhortations thus repeatedly inculcated.

We must by no means omit to mention those hearers of the gospel, who seek *entertainment* in places of worship, when conscience remonstrates against other amusements.—These are *amateurs* of oratory, good language, and graceful delivery; they admire the flights of a fine and vigorous imagination; or perhaps they are pleased with close reasoning, or the discussions of an acute logician: though numbers of this class are as deficient in judgment, as in piety. They gratify themselves, however, by hearing preachers, whose talents suit their taste, whatever that may be. This employment sometimes agreeably fills up a vacant hour which might otherwise be tedious: and they *endure* even the truth, for the sake of the *manner* in which it is delivered! Such persons attended Ezekiel. "Lo thou art to them," said the Lord to his prophet, "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words but they do them not." Ezek. xxxiii. 30—34.

The *captious* hearer likewise requires to be noticed. He comes on purpose to criticise and find fault; to try every one's doctrine by his standard; to discover his own acuteness by detecting some error of the preacher, and to "make a man an offender for a word." He seeks for nothing but the bran or the chaff, and these alone he carries away. He means not to *learn*, much less to practice: and he must therefore be a hearer only, and not a doer of the word.—I would not, however, have you conclude, that we deem our auditors obliged to credit all we say, or precluded from the free exercise of their own judgment. Men may diligently compare our doctrine with the Scriptures, and differ from us in many particulars; while they edify by every sermon, and are doers of the word: for they may examine with sobriety, humility, and candour; and differ with reluctance and earnest prayer to be directed aright. But the captious hearer resembles a man, who turns with disgust from a plentiful table, because he dislikes some one dish. Nay, he goes to the feast, not to eat, but to shew his delicate and fastidious taste by finding fault with the provisions.

Time would fail, should we consider the *curious* hearer, who goes to find out what some celebrated preacher has got to say, perhaps that he may turn it into ridicule; the *procrastinating* hearer, who intends to practise when he has a more convenient opportunity; and many others, who might in like manner be arraigned and condemned.

It must, however, be obvious, that all such persons fall short of every purpose for which the word of God was mercifully given. "How do ye say, we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes is in vain." Jer. viii. 8. The word of truth continually calls them to consider their ways, and examine their hearts and lives; that they may become acquainted with their state and character; this they *hear* indeed, but continue careless and inconsiderate! They are warned to flee from the wrath to come; but they flee not: and they are invited to come to Christ that their souls may live; but they refuse him that speaketh. Wisdom thus expostulateth with them, "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you:" but "they set at nought all her counsel, and despise all her reproof." They are commanded to repent, and to cast away all their idols and transgressions: but they cleave to their sins, and "after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up wrath against

Digitized by Google

the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." They are exhorted to pray without ceasing, but they seem to say, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?" They pay no practical regard to Christ, while he commands them to "labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" "to strive to enter in at the strait gate; to search the Scriptures; and to take his yoke upon them." They hear, indeed, and admire or object as their notions are sanctioned or opposed: but if Christ be the author of eternal salvation to those alone who *obey him*; and if all they be his enemies, "who will not have him to reign over them;" such persons will as certainly perish, as any description of sinners whatsoever. Nay, a partial obedience, which interferes not with their inclinations or interests, does not warrant them to expect a more favourable doom: "for he that keepeth the whole law, and offendeth in one point, is guilty of all." According to the law itself, a man is condemned for a single transgression; and according to the gospel, he who habitually commits one known sin, is adjudged a hypocrite and unbeliever. If this were not so, Herod might have retained Herodias; nor would it be necessary for us to part with the right hand or the right eye which causes us to offend.

Whether we consider revelation as intended to reconcile us to God, to make known to us the way of peace, to be the means of our renewal to holiness, to prepare us for glorifying God on earth, to fit us for enjoying his love in heaven, or to teach us to do good among men, and serve our generation; it is evident that hearing without practising fails entirely of accomplishing any one of these purposes. This is so obvious in itself, and so constantly inculcated in every part of Scripture, that it would be almost incredible that any man should be deceived by so palpable a cheat, were it not most lamentably common; nor can this fact be accounted for, but by allowing that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

III. Then we consider the nature and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

It is observable that the apostle does not here warn us against the artifices of "Satan transformed into an angel of light;" or those of "his ministers transformed into the ministers of righteousness." These indeed will never be wanting in subtle endeavours to beguile the souls of the simple: yet they can *fatally* deceive none, who are not disposed to deceive themselves. —It may also be remarked, that such persons seldom impose on other men. The ministers of Christ stand in doubt of them; nay are often fully convinced of their awful delusion, and, with tears of affection, risk their displeasure by trying to undeceive them: but such endeavours are generally ascribed to harshness, prejudice, or calumny. They seldom deceive consistent Christians, as they may discover by the shyness and reserve of their conduct towards *them*, while frankness and cordiality mark their social intercouse with more approved characters. Nay, the people of the world can commonly distinguish real pious and upright believers from mere speculating professors. Many of them court the society of such self-deceivers, while they fear meeting with persons of eminent sanctity: they can endure a man's creed, provided his example sanctions their spirit and conduct; and as such professors "are of the world, therefore the world loveth them;" while it hates those whom Christ hath chosen out of the world. There are, however, men that make no pretensions to religion, who respect those that are consistently pious: yet these join with many who honour them by their hatred, in heartily despising him, who is a hearer of the word, and not a doer.

But let us consider some of the methods, by which such men deceive themselves. The sacred Scriptures ascribe the salvation of sinners wholly to *grace*, or free unmerited mercy; and declare that none of our own righteousness has contributed, or can contribute, to procure the inestimable blessing: now, some general confused notions of this fundamental truth help

Digitized by Google

numbers to deceive themselves. Not considering salvation in its extensive meaning, as comprising the whole of our reconciliation to God and recovery to holiness; but confining their thoughts merely to pardon and justification; they infer that good works must *in all respects* be excluded from our views of the gospel. It is indeed most true, that "we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" but it is equally true, that the will and power to perform real good works is an essential part of our gratuitous salvation. "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them."—"The grace of God, which bringeth salvation,—teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Eph. ii. 8—10. Tit. ii. 11—14.

This is the uniform language of the New Testament; and it is most evidently rational: for the renewal of a fallen creature to holiness is as needful, important, and unmerited a favour, as pardon and the gift of righteousness by faith: but for want of attending to this, numbers take occasion from the doctrines of grace to deceive themselves. Indeed ministers frequently use unscriptural expressions on the subject, which are extremely liable to misconstruction; and they often give a disproportionate statement of the truth: yet it must also be allowed, that the very words of Scripture may in this manner be perverted. Thus Peter observed, concerning the writings of his beloved brother Paul, "in them were some things hard to be understood which they, that were unlearned and unstable, wrested, as they did the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." 2 Peter iii. 16.

The language of the sacred writers concerning *faith* is likewise most decided: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned."—By faith alone, and by no other operation of the mind or action of the life, can the sinner appropriate, and be made partaker of, the righteousness and redemption of Christ. But while numbers presumptuously use language diametrically opposite to that of holy writ; there are many who deceive themselves by a misapprehension of the Scriptural doctrine. Various arguments have convinced them that certain opinions are true, and they dispute earnestly for them. Surely, say they, we *believe;* and if we believe, we have all things in Christ, "who of God is made to us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Hence they conclude, that practice should only be insisted upon in general terms; and, while secular motives restrain them from scandalous immoralities, they imagine that all is well, and nothing further is required. But they do not duly consider the difference between dead, and living faith: they forget that the latter *only* justifies us in the sight of God: and that the same faith, which unites the soul to Christ, works also by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and produces unreserved and zealous obedience. And while they give peculiar attention to St Paul's argument concerning justification by faith alone; they overlook the account he gives of the holy fruits produced by this justifying faith; especially in the conduct of Abraham and Moses, and other ancient believers, as stated in the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews.

The word of God gives us abundant reason to expect, that the true believer's experience will confirm and attest the sincerity of his faith. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:" "Having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." "The day dawn and the day-star shall arise in your hearts." Eph. i. 13. 2 Peter i. 19. 1 John v. 10. The meaning of these Scriptures, and many others to the same effect, is very important: and teaches us, that the real disciples of Christ experience such effects in their own souls, from believing the doctrines, and relying on the promises of the gospel, as abundantly satisfy them, that the Lord is faithful to his word, and that

Digitized by Google

he both comforts and sanctifies his people by the Truth. But numbers deceive themselves by a counterfeit experience. They have been alarmed, have changed the ground of their confidence, have had their imaginations heated and delighted by impressions and visionary representations: they have recollected the promises of the gospel, as if spoken to *them* with peculiar appropriation, to certify them that their sins were forgiven: and having seen and heard such wonderful things, they think they must no more doubt of their adoption into the family of God. They have also frequently heard all experience profanely ridiculed as enthusiasm; and this betrays them into the opposite extreme, so that they are emboldened to despise every caution, as the result of enmity to internal religion; and to act as if there were no delusive or counterfeit experience. But the event too plainly shews their awful mistake; and that they grounded their expectations upon the account given of the extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of prophets, rather than on the promises of his *renewing influences* in the hearts of believers. When therefore they lose the impressions with which they once were elated, they relapse nearly into their old course of life, their creed and confidence alone excepted. The seed of the word, which had sprung up, withers, because it hath no root: they are not doers, but hearers only, deceiving their own selves.—But the seal of the Spirit, like that affixed to the melted wax, leaves an indelible impression, and the image of Christ will in some measure be discernible, in the temper and conduct of those who have received it, through all changes to the end of life.

We are but little acquainted with the real character and secret conduct of each other, except in the most intimate relations and connections; and in populous cities this is peculiarly the case. We see men attend on public ordinances, we hear from them, in occasional conversation, the language of believers, and we know nothing concerning them inconsistent with these appearances. It is our duty to love the brethren, and to speak comfortably to them. Charity hopeth all things and thinketh no evil: we therefore behave to such men as brethren; and this circumstance helps many to deceive themselves. The self-flattery of the human heart is inconceivable, and its effects prodigious: so that numbers put the candid opinion of ministers or Christians, who scarcely know any thing of them, in counterpoise to the accusations of their own conscience, respecting many secret sins which they habitually commit. They even persuade themselves that these allowed crimes are of the same nature with the infirmities, which believers humbly confess and deplore: and thus they maintain a confidence in direct opposition to Scripture, and call it *faith*; nay, they deem this an high attainment, and "hope against hope," in a sense, with which neither Abraham nor Paul were at all acquainted.

Mistaken notions of liberty likewise lead men into fatal delusions: for instead of deeming the service of God perfect freedom, and seeking deliverance from the yoke of sin and Satan, from love of the world and from the fear of man; they imagine liberty to consist in living according to their own inclinations, without remorse of conscience or dread of consequences; just as numbers can form no idea of civil liberty, unless they be allowed to indulge their selfish passions without restraint. When therefore we exhort them to submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and to serve him in holy obedience; they exclaim that this is *legal*, and leads them into bondage: and they choose such teachers as "promise them liberty, while they themselves are the slaves of corruption." These are a few of the innumerable ways, in which men deceive themselves, by hearing the word of truth without reducing it to practice.

But whence arises this fatal propensity to self-deception, in a matter of infinite importance? Our Lord answered this question, when he said "every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." The human heart is prone to idolize the world, and to seek happiness in the enjoyment of it; and is averse to a life of prac-

Digitized by Google

tical godliness. But when a man is at all acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible, his conscience becomes an unquiet inmate, unless some way be taken to silence its remonstrances. Various methods have therefore been adopted of reconciling a worldly life with the hope of future happiness: and self-flattery, which palliates a man's vices and enhances the value of his supposed virtues, is a powerful coadjutor in this attempt.—But among these plans perhaps no one is so cheap and convenient, as hearing and assenting to the gospel; if a man be able to persuade himself, that such a faith will save him. This requires less trouble and self-denial, than any other system: while it helps him to ascribe that decency of conduct, which secular motives impose, to his religious opinions; and to deem all his omissions and transgressions, defects, which are common to believers. A superficial hearer of the word may thus easily suppose, that he is in the way of salvation, while he lives in habitual disobedience to the known commandments of God: and when the faithful address of a minister shakes this vain confidence; the man may be seduced to charge the blame on the doctrine, and to shrink from conviction by going to those places, where smoother and more comfortable things are spoken.—Could we therefore witness all that passes in the retirement, the family, and the dealings of those, who after a time forsake our ministry, we should perhaps not be at all surprised at losing them; though we must grieve to discover such awful self-deception.

These are the sources of this evil, which will certainly terminate in everlasting ruin, unless it be previously discovered and remedied.

IV. Then we consider the contrast here stated between the mere hearer, and the practical student of Scripture.

The word of God, that perfect law of liberty, through which the believer is freed from bondage and condemnation, is compared by the apostle to a mirror; in which a man beholds the reflection of his person, and by which he may adjust every thing in his appearance after the most becoming manner. The mere hearer resembles one, who gives a transient look in this mirror; but taking little notice of his appearance, and bestowing no pains to alter any thing in his attire, "he goes his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."—Thus many give a slight attention to the truth, and get a transient glimpse of their own state and character: but they dislike the mortifying discovery, are uneasy under the fleeting conviction, and have no inclination for that repentance and conversion to which the Scripture calls them. They therefore try to believe, that approbation and assent may suffice, and that the gospel does not require practice. They go and plunge themselves into business or pleasure, and soon forget their convictions: and thus remain ignorant of their accumulated guilt and urgent danger, and strangers to regeneration, reconciliation to God, the life of faith, the sweet obedience of love, and all those things that accompany salvation.

On the other hand, the man who stedfastly looks into the Scriptures, comparing all his conduct past and present, and even his thoughts, affections, tempers, motives, and words, with the holy law; who thus learns his whole duty to God and his neighbour, according to all his various relations and obligations; and who continues daily considering his ways, and contemplating himself in this faithful mirror; will soon become acquainted with his own heart and character, and perceive his need of the mercy and grace proposed in the gospel. By persevering in this course of self-examination, without being offended by the discoveries he makes; he will speedily understand that he ought to humble himself before God, for sins more numerous than the hairs of his head: and experience will convince him, that he can neither atone for the least of his former transgressions, nor answer the righteous demands of the divine law; nay, that he cannot truly repent, except by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. His daily efforts will bring him more and more acquainted with his sins of omission and commission, the defilements of his duties, the hidden evils of his heart, the strength of his de-

Digitized by Google

praved propensities, and the power of habits and temptations. These things will render him weary of attempting to "establish his own righteousness," or to change his own nature. He will now be capable of understanding the words of the apostle: "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he will now most cordially adopt; and the nature, glory, and preciousness of the free salvation revealed in the gospel will be more and more unfolded to his view. Thus he will learn with increasing simplicity to plead the name of Christ in genuine faith; to come to the Father by him, and to rely solely on his righteousness, redemption, and mediation, for acceptance and eternal life.

In this manner the practical student of Scripture, being justified by faith, and having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, will make still further progress in the divine life. The convincing and enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, through the instruction of the written word, will continually discover to him defects and defilements in his dispositions and conduct, which he had not before observed. Thus while he presses forward and aspires after nearer and nearer conformity to his perfect rule, repentance, faith, watchfulness, and fervent prayer will become more and more habitual, and as it were natural to him. His heart will grow more humble, and his conscience more tender, his dependence on Christ more simple, and his gratitude for redeeming love more abundant, in proportion to the degree of his sanctification. These things will render him likewise more compassionate, tender, forbearing, and forgiving; more patient and self-denying, and more ready to encounter dangers and difficulties, in promoting the cause of Christ among his fellow-sinners.—And as no absolute perfection can be attained on earth: and such a believer deems all faulty and deformed, which does not come up to the requirement of the holy law, and the spotless example of the Saviour; so no limits can be assigned to his discoveries and progress during his continuance in this world.

This is the character described by the apostle, "he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work; and he shall be blessed in his *doing*." He is made wise unto salvation, and shall "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost:" he shall find liberty and pleasure in the ways of God; be made useful to society, and a blessing to his connections; and he shall "have an entrance administered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

No man who duly considers these things, can doubt the practical nature and tendency of the gospel. Christ is our sole foundation: but no one builds on that foundation, except he hear his sayings, and do them. The practical hearer's faith is living; he is a wise man, and this will appear to all the world, when the folly of those who build upon the sand by a dead faith, by hearing and not doing, will be exposed to universal contempt. Alas, my brethren, how numerous are such nominal Christians, "who call Christ Lord, but do not the things that he says!" But unless the design of the gospel be answered in our hearts and lives, the gospel itself will increase our condemnation.

Are any of you then sensible that your hearing has hitherto failed to influence your practice? Let me conjure you by the love you bear to your own happiness, not to put off the alarming conviction, by saying, "go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient opportunity I will call for thee." It is not yet too late. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." But you know not how soon the master of the house may shut to the door; and then it will be too late to begin to say, "Lord, Lord, open to us:" for he will silence every plea, and bid you depart as "workers of iniquity."

But have you, my brethren, begun seriously to practise what you know, and to inquire the will of God that you may do it? Blessed be the Lord for his grace bestowed on you! Go on in this way, my beloved brethren;

Digitized by Google

had even the most humiliating discoveries you make of yourselves, will serve to endear the gospel of salvation to you. "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" "For the path of the just shineth more and more to the perfect day." The practice of duty will prepare your hearts for the reception of truth; by removing those prejudices, with which the prevalence of carnal affections closes the understandings of the disobedient: and every accession of spiritual knowledge will have a sanctifying, and comforting effect upon your hearts.

Finally, were we as desirous of having our souls adorned with holiness, as most persons are of decorating the poor dying body; we should certainly make continual discoveries of our remaining uncomeliness, and be thankful for assistance in such researches; and we should make daily progress in sanctification; by "putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

SERMON XIV.

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY, EXPLAINED AND CONTRASTED.

1 CORINTHIANS, XIII. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three: but the greatest of these is charity.

THE apostle, in this remarkable chapter, shews the Corinthians, that the most splendid and useful of those miraculous powers, which they emulously coveted and ostentatiously displayed, were far inferior in value to sanctifying grace: yea, that when united with the deepest knowledge of divine mysteries, the most self-denying liberality, and the most vehement zeal, they were nothing without charity; and did not so much as prove the possessor to be a real Christian of the lowest order. He then describes charity, as a man would define gold, by its distinguishing properties, which are the same in a grain as in a ton; but the more a man possesses, and the less alloy is found in the mass, the richer he is. And having shewn that charity would never fail; whereas miraculous powers would cease, and knowledge itself would be swallowed up and lost in the perfect light of heaven, he adds, "and now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three: but the greatest of these is charity."—It is evident, that he meant to sum up, in these three radical graces, the grand essentials of vital Christianity, to which all other holy affections and dispositions may be referred. As the word *charity* is now used for one peculiar expression of love, which is equivocal and may be counterfeit: it will render our discussion more perspicuous to substitute *love* in the place of it, it being well known that the original word is generally thus translated. I shall endeavour, therefore,

I. To consider separately and copiously the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

II. To shew briefly in what respects love is the greatest of the three; and how this agrees with the doctrines of justification and salvation *by faith* alone.

The subject before us, my brethren, is of the greatest importance, and often fatally misunderstood. Let me then beg a peculiar measure of your attention; and let us lift up our hearts to the Lord, beseeching him to

Digitized by Google

"open our understandings, that we may understand the Scriptures," and be guided into the knowledge of his holy truth.

I. Let us consider separately and copiously the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

We begin with faith. That peculiar act of the understanding, by which we avail ourselves of information given us by others, in those things which fall not under our own observation, and which do not admit of proof in a way of reasoning, is called *faith* or *believing*. If we credit testimony without sufficient grounds, we are unreasonably credulous: if we refuse to believe testimony which has sufficient grounds of credibility, we are unreasonably incredulous. It is therefore extremely absurd to oppose *reason* and *faith*, as if contrary to each other; when in fact faith is the use of reason in a certain way, and in cases which confine us to that peculiar exercise of our rational powers. *Believing* may be distinguished from *reasoning*, and in some cases opposed to it: but in opposing *faith* and *reason*, the friends of Christianity have given its enemies an advantage, to which they are by no means entitled.

It is evident to all observing men, that the complicated machine of human society is moved, almost exclusively, by that very principle which numbers oppose and deride in speaking on religion. Testimony received and credited directs the determinations of princes and councils, of senates and military commanders, of tribunals and commercial companies, in their most important deliberations: and did they refuse to act, without self-evidence, demonstration, or personal knowledge, all their grand affairs must stagnate. But human testimony, though often fallacious, is deemed credible: they believe, decide, and carry their decisions into execution. In the common concerns of life too, we believe a guide, a physician, a lawyer, and even those who provide our food; and the incredulous sceptic in such cases must be ruined, left to starve, or perish by disease.

But "if the testimony of man be great, the testimony of God is greater." The Scripture is "the sure testimony of God; which giveth wisdom to the simple." 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. It relates to facts, the certainty of which God hath attested; to doctrines he hath immediately revealed; to promises and assurances concerning the future, which he hath engaged to accomplish; and to commands and ordinances which he hath thus enforced with that clearness and authority the case required. All these things are intimately connected with our duty, safety, and felicity; they are made known for our warning, encouragement, and instruction: faith receives the information, and this excites and directs the believer's activity. We may *reason* soberly and humbly concerning the evidences of revelation, and the meaning of Scripture: but when these points have been ascertained, our reasons are at an end; for either faith receives the testimony of God, or unbelief makes him a liar.

Faith, strictly speaking, is 'the belief of *the truth*;' with the application of it to ourselves, and a perception of its importance, holiness, excellency, and suitableness to our characters and circumstances. It is the gift and operation of God: for many of the truths, revealed in Scripture, are so contrary to our pride, prejudices, and worldly lusts, that no evidence is sufficient to induce our cordial belief of them, till our minds have been prepared by preventing grace. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14. True faith should therefore be sought by earnest prayer; and lively gratitude is due to God from those that have been enabled to believe.

Faith appropriates the declarations of Scripture, respecting things past, present, and future; whether they appear dreadful or desirable. The believer credits the testimony of God, concerning his own essential nature and perfections, and the righteousness of his law and government. In the same

Digitized by Google

manner he obtains information respecting the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and misery,—the fall of man,—the evil and desert of sin,—the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart,—the immortality of the soul,—the resurrection of the body,—the future state of judgment,—and an eternal state of happiness or misery. Men may conjecture and dispute on these subjects; but faith, receiving the testimony of God with the teachableness of a child, satisfies the mind and influences the conduct, as if we saw the things believed, with our own eyes. It is therefore impossible, *thus* to credit these doctrines, and not take warning to "flee from the wrath to come." Faith must, in this case, produce fear of the wrath revealed from heaven against our sins; and as it is always accompanied with some feeble discoveries of mercy; it will also in some degree soften and humble the heart to repentance, and excite earnest inquiries after salvation.

But we are especially called upon to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son. "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The numerous and decisive declarations of Scripture on this subject, have induced some persons to speak of faith, as exclusively meaning a reception of Christ for salvation: and no doubt this is the grand exercise and use of it. Yet in fact, unless we believe many other truths of God's word, with such application to ourselves, as produces true humiliation of heart, we never can believe in the Son of God in a saving manner. We may assent to the doctrines of grace, and abuse them: but we cannot understand their nature, glory, and suitableness to our case and circumstances.

True faith simply credits the divine record concerning the person of Emmanuel; his essential and eternal deity, and his voluntary incarnation that he might be our Brother and Surety, God manifest in the flesh; his obedience of infinite value, and the atoning sacrifice of his death upon the cross; his resurrection, ascension, and intercession in the presence of God for us; his several offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and all the various particulars, concerning his power, truth, love, fulness of grace, mediatorial authority, and future coming to judgment. This belief cannot be separated from a cordial compliance with his invitations, a thankful reception of him in all his characters and offices, an habitual dependence on him for salvation, and a constant application for all the blessings purchased by his sufferings and death. Thus we spiritually "eat his flesh and drink his blood; which are meat indeed and drink indeed:" and thus 'we feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

"To you that believe he is precious." In proportion to the degree of our faith, Christ becomes to us "the pearl of great price;" and we grow more and more solicitous, lest we should come short of him and his salvation. This renders us decided in renouncing other confidences, "counting all but loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him;" diligently using all the means of grace, observing the directions given us, and making every sacrifice necessary for the securing of this main concern. Joyful hope will animate us with most lively gratitude. Advancing knowledge and matured experience will render our dependence more simple; and receiving continually from the fulness of Christ the supply of all our wants, he will become more and more glorious in our eyes and precious to our hearts; while increasing sanctification, and abundant diligence in the work of the Lord, will enhance our sense of obligation, without in the least deducting from our simplicity of reliance on him as our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."—'We are crucified with Christ; nevertheless we live: yet not we, but Christ liveth in us; and the life that we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us." Gal. ii. 20.

True faith has likewise respect to the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture. These are sure testimonies of God, ratified by all the engagements of the new covenant, in the blood of the great Mediator; and

Digitized by Google

the promised blessings belong exclusively to all true believers, though they cannot always perceive their own title to them.

The doctrines and promises of Scripture relate very much to the person, offices, and influences of the Holy Spirit. If then we truly believe these divine testimonies, with application to our own wants, and perceive the value of these life-giving, illuminating, sanctifying, and comforting influences; we shall certainly apply for them, and depend on them continually. Thus we shall *believe in* the Holy Ghost, and honour him together with the Father and the Son, as the triune God of our salvation.—"Faith is likewise the evidence of things not seen." It perceives the hand of God, and hears his voice, in all the varied events of providence: it realizes his holy, heart-searching, and gracious presence in all places: it penetrates invisible things; lays heaven and hell open to our view: contemplates the world of good and evil spirits, with which we are surrounded; and looks forward to judgment and eternity, as just at hand. Thus it supplies the want of sight and sense. "We endure, as seeing him that is invisible." "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." We set God before us in our daily conduct and conversation: we perceive his special presence with us in his sacred ordinances; we speak to him in prayer and praise; we hear his word of instruction and direction; we have "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; we walk with God *by faith*;" we stand, we war, we run, we obey, and endure *by faith*; believing, we rely on God for strength, help, protection, support, and comfort according to his word; and thus are emboldened and enabled to face danger, resist temptation, renounce the world, bear the sharpest sufferings, and persevere in the hardest services to which we can be called. Heb. xi.

It is evident that faith alone can answer these purposes; and that no other grace of Christianity, however excellent and necessary, can supply its place. Faith alone can appropriate the instructions of Scripture; form our union with Christ, that we may be "made the righteousness of God in him;" seek supplies of every blessing from his fulness; rely on the faithfulness of God for the performance of his promises; supply the want of sight, and give nearness and certainty to invisible and eternal things. But it is also evident that an assent to certain historical facts, or a set of inactive notions, or a groundless confidence of the divine favour, cannot be the faith of which such things are spoken. For this is a living and operative principle: it calls forth fear, hope, desire, aversion, love, gratitude, and every other affection of the soul, into most vigorous and abiding exercise; and by their combined or varied energies overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil; fights a good fight, and obtains a most honourable victory.

We proceed next to consider the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of Hope.

Hope is the expectation of future good, real or supposed. We may believe and expect what we dread and would escape: we may desire, what we despair of obtaining: but we hope for those things alone, which we desire and in some measure expect. In one form or other it is the chief solace of human life: no man is happy at present; but all hope for happiness, and pursue it according to their different notions. The hope and pursuit afford some pleasure, and keep the mind from preying on itself: but disappointment is certain to all who seek happiness in worldly things, whether they be prosperous or unsuccessful in their projects.—There is also a religious hope, which is no less delusive, and even more certainly fatal: because the mistake is not discovered till it is too late to make a wiser choice. A warranted hope of happiness in the favour of our God, is, however, secure from disappointment, and ensures present support and everlasting felicity. The apostle exhorts us to "be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us." 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16. But, while almost all we meet avow a hope of being saved, there are very

Digitized by Google

few that are able to give a solid reason for this hope; and if it be unreasonable, it must be presumptuous. The sinner who warrantably hopes for everlasting felicity, and for various blessings in this present world, could assign some such reasons as follow, for the hope that is in him, if he possessed the gift of utterance, and could orderly arrange his thoughts. 'The Scriptures,' he would say, 'have been proved to be the word of God, and I am satisfied on that head. They reveal the just and holy God, as merciful and gracious, forgiving sin and saving sinners, through his beloved Son, whom he hath set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice, and who "is able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." This divine Saviour invites all that will to come to him; and adds, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." I know myself to be a vile sinner, and I repent in dust and ashes. I am conscious that I renounce all other pleas, own the justice of God in my condemnation, and sue only for mercy through Emmanuel's blood; "My soul longeth for God's salvation, and I hope in his word:" I desire to be made willing to part with all for Christ; and I pray for true faith, and stronger faith. I perceive something of the nature and glory of God's way of saving sinners, and I approve of it as worthy of him, and suitable to men; and I long to see and admire the displays of his glory more and more. I trust I have experienced in some degree that change of heart, that new creation, which the Scriptures describe as accompanying salvation. My desires, conflicts, fears, sorrows, comforts, and state of mind coincide with what I read in the word of God, concerning his believing people in former ages. I trust I do feel some measure of contrition, fear, and love of God, love of Christ and his people, and other affections, to which I once was wholly a stranger; and it is my grief and burden, that I feel them no more, and am harassed by so many things contrary to the best desires of my heart. I long to serve the Lord with fervent zeal; "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I feel another law,—warring against this law of my mind." I cannot do the things that I would:" and were it not for the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus, this would make me most completely wretched. But I trust I do believe in him, and am interested in the promises made by him: thus I wait for increasing sanctification; and at length expect perfect holiness and happiness according to that everlasting covenant, which God hath confirmed with an oath, that we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." Heb. vi. 16—20.

Thus the believer can give a reason for his hope; in general the word of God warrants the sinner to hope for mercy and grace; and in particular the work of the Holy Spirit on the believer's heart, "seals him to the day of redemption," and gives him a special warrant to expect the performance of all the promises of God to his soul. It is the earnest, the first-fruits, the pledge of glory: it is renovation to the divine image; and while the believer feels filial affections towards its reconciled Father, "the Spirit of adoption witnesseth with his spirit, that he is a child, and an heir of God through Jesus Christ." In proportion as a man has a right judgment in these matters, and clearly perceives that he has experienced these influences of the Holy Spirit, and has grace in lively exercise; his hope rises to full assurance; but misapprehension, weakness of faith, sloth, temptation, and quenching or grieving the spirit, darken the evidence, and weaken his confidence. This good hope through grace is obtained and preserved by holy diligence. Heb. vi. 11. 2 Peter i. 10. But presumption of any kind may be acquired and maintained by the slothful. The former prevails most upon strict Scriptural self-examination, and is cleared up by an increase of spiritual knowledge: but the latter cannot endure close investigation; and would be destroyed by discoveries of the divine holiness, the excellency of the commandment, the evil of sin, and the real nature and tendency of the gospel. Genuine hope has many variations; it rises and sinks, like the mercury in the barometer; now it prevails and triumphs, and now it is shaken: and the

Digitized by Google

possessor, not doubting either the power, truth, or love of Christ, is led to question whether he be a true believer, when he has been drawn into very unsuitable tempers and conduct. But presumption is unfeeling: it resembles more the case of death than that of health; and therefore is generally invariable.

The true hope is living and active. "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, as the Lord is pure." In proportion as it abounds, a man feels himself animated for every duty: and it is connected with the exercise of all other graces: "hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." But the hypocrite's hope is solitary and inactive: instead of stimulating him to exertion, it soothes him into indolence and self-indulgence, and he cannot be excited to diligence, unless affrighted with the dread of hell. His confidence is a vain expectation of safety and happiness, by an abused reliance on some promises, without a cordial obedience to the gospel, and acceptance of its salvation.

The living hope of a Christian "is the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast."—The anchor is intended to retain the vessel in its station, notwithstanding tides, currents, and tempests; and it is generally useful to prevent it from driving, and running foul of other ships, on the strand, and on rocks or quicksands.—In like manner we have a station to fill up; the fluctuating tides of fashion, opinion, and false doctrines; the temptations of Satan and his agents, the frowns of the world, and trials of various kinds tend to drive us from it, to hurry us into some ruinous conduct, or within the reach of some tremendous whirlpool. But the hope of eternal happiness, and of all things needful for life and godliness, according to the express promises of God; with the cheering earnest and anticipation of these inestimable benefits, and the fear of coming short of them, keep us stedfast in our place, and to our duty. Thus we are animated to renounce present advantages, to endure hardships, to resist temptations, to face persecutors, and to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart: even as the soldier, the mariner, and the merchant, are emboldened and excited to patience and perseverance, by the hope of the desired compensation of their peculiar dangers and fatigues. Despair of success would in all these cases damp men's ardour, and enervate their endeavours.—This hope is peculiarly necessary in seasons of urgent danger or severe persecution, that the Christian may be rendered "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that his labour is not in vain in the Lord." The sacred writers, therefore, exhort believers to "hope unto the end;" and bestow much pains to exhibit the variety, excellency, and glory of the promised blessings, in the most striking and affecting manner.—"Rejoice," says our Lord, "and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who—hath begotten us again to a lively hope;—to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled; and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Matt. v. 12. 2 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Peter i. 3—8. "We are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for what we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Rom. viii. 24, 25. "God,—who hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17. "Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing, that ye may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost." Rom. xvi. 13.

These and many other Scriptures, shew the importance of lively and abounding hope in the Christian warfare. By faith we discern the promised good afar off; in fervent desire we embrace it; and in hope resting on the word and perfections of God, we patiently wait for it; amidst discouragements, delays, conflicts, difficulties and sufferings; for "it is good to hope,

Digitized by Google

and quietly to wait the salvation of the Lord." This hope is frequently called *trusting in God, or trusting in Christ;* and it implies that steady reliance on his power, truth, wisdom, and mercy, which takes the soul off from trusting in men or creatures, and rescues it from all self-confidence. Expecting happiness from the Lord alone, according to his word, the believer parts with or refuses present things, in expectation of better blessings in reversion; waits the Lord's time for them, seeks them in his way, and prepares for the enjoyment of them by following after holiness, and abounding in every good work. He knows that no feeble attempt nor intended good work shall lose its reward from God, however unsuccessful, or ill requited among men: this produces "the patience of hope," and is connected with submission, contentment, and cheerful perseverance in well-doing: while the believer seeks for glory, honour, and immortality. Even as the Lord Jesus, "for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame." It is therefore called the helmet of salvation, and the breast-plate of hope: for without it we are incapable of fighting the good fight of faith; and we uniformly find, that in proportion as genuine hope prevails, we are prepared to wrestle, labour, or endure hardship; and when greatly discouraged, we are heartless in every undertaking, and unfit for every service.

From first to last of our Christian course, hope must be as the anchor, the helmet, and the breast-plate of our souls. How firmly soever we believe the doctrines of revelation, yet unless we have a warranted and holy expectation of obtaining the various blessings proposed to us, we shall go on feebly even in smooth and prosperous scenes, and we should faint in times of difficulty. The more assured this true hope is, the greater will be our constancy and diligence in the ways of God: and while the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite is inefficacious and useless, often failing in life, and certainly expiring at death; the hope that hath been described, "is sure and stedfast;" it lays hold of the unfailing word of God; it is maintained by supplies of the Spirit of Christ, and encouraged by constant experience; and it will abide in its principle and exercise, till it be swallowed up in the enjoyment of heavenly felicity.

We now proceed to consider the peculiar nature, use, and exercise of love. The apostle indeed in the chapter before us speaks principally of love to mankind; yet we cannot suppose, that he meant to exclude the love of God: but he considered the professed Christian's love to his brethren whom he had seen, as the most unequivocal evidence of his love to God whom he had not seen. 1 John iv. 20, 21. The whole Scripture, however, authorises, and requires us to speak fully upon this subject: and surely no rational man, acquainted with the sacred oracles, will maintain, that acts of benevolence, without regard to God, and separated from genuine faith and hope, is *that* love, on which the apostle bestows such high encomiums! No doubt *this* abides in the heart, and in the church, united with faith and hope, and is inseparable from them.—The holy law requires us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; and this is written in the inward parts of the redeemed sinner, by the renewal of the Holy Ghost. He thus learns supremely to love, admire, and adore the glorious excellencies of the divine character; to seek his happiness in God; to thirst after him or rejoice in him, above all other things; to feel lively gratitude for his boundless mercies; to devote himself willingly to his service; to manifest an ardent zeal for his glory, lively joy when his name is honoured, and poignant grief when impiety and iniquity triumph; and fervently to pray, "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in heaven."

This love to God is particularly expressed in fervent affection to the Lord Jesus, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. Through him sinners know, approach, trust, worship, and serve a God of infinite justice and holiness; and in his person and redemption, the harmonious glory of all the perfections of the godhead is displayed, more than in all his

Digitized by Google

other works. It is indeed very remarkable, that every kind and degree of love which Jehovah claims by his holy law, is demanded for the Lord Jesus by his apostles and evangelists. So that, in supremely loving Christ, desiring, rejoicing and glorying in him; thanking, praising, and adoring him; magnifying him in our bodies, whether by life or death; "being purified *unto him* a peculiar people, zealous of good works," honouring and obeying him unreservedly; we evidently obey, honour, and love the Father, according to the requirements of his holy word. And this demonstrates that "he and the Father are One," in the strictest sense imaginable.

The immense obligations redeemed sinners have received from the divine Saviour, render this exercise of love to him peculiarly reasonable and delightful: yet it is not merely gratitude, or lively emotions of the animal passions. It is a rational choice of the Lord as our portion and salvation, an admiring love of every display of his perfections; and a disposition to delight in doing his will, and promoting the manifestation of his glory among men. It is therefore the spring and first mover in all spiritual worship and obedience; as well as the principal duty required from us. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." Under every dispensation, and in all possible circumstances, on earth, or in heaven; this must be the essence of true religion: all external services are no further acceptable, than as they spring from love. Even the *fear* which differs from profound reverence of that infinite excellency we supremely love, in the present state is useful; but it diminishes as love gathers strength, and will cease when love shall be perfected.

This holy affection to our glorious Creator, Benefactor and Saviour, must be shewn by love to our neighbours and brethren. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:" these words briefly comprehend the whole law of God in this respect: and our Lord's parable, or narrative, of the good Samaritan hath taught us, that every human being, whatever be his nation or religion, and however he may have acted towards us, is our *neighbour*; entitled to our cordial good-will, and our kind offices, when within our reach and in need of our assistance. He himself hath far exceeded the kindness of the good Samaritan, in assuming our nature, and saving us rebels and enemies by his suffering and death upon the cross; and in both respects he hath said to us "Go and do likewise."

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." This commandment therefore, if universally obeyed, would preclude all kinds and degrees of fraud, injustice, oppression, slander, and every other word and action, in the least injurious to any human being; yea, all hard thoughts and ill wishes, suspicion, resentment, envy, coveting, or selfishness. On the other hand, love seeks the benefit of its object, and rejoices in his happiness: if then we love our neighbour as we ought, we shall desire to promote his good in every respect, by all suitable means in our power. In proportion as our love abounds, we shall be ready to deny ourselves, to labour, and to incur expence, in contributing to his advantage. If we really love our neighbour as we *ought to love ourselves*, we shall seek his highest good in the first place, and aim to render all our kind endeavours subservient to his everlasting welfare. His happiness is of equal value with our own; his soul, life, ease, peace, and reputation, are as important as ours. We ought therefore to seek his good sincerely and earnestly; and to give up inferior interests, and endure inferior sufferings, when we can thus preserve him from heavier distress, or procure for him superior blessings; provided it can be done consistently with the duties of our several relations in life.—We should love what is amiable, respect what is honourable, praise what is commendable, excuse what is excuseable, bear with, and forgive what is faulty, and put the best construction on what is doubtful in our neighbour's conduct; and commiserate and relieve his distresses; exactly as we would that others should do to us in similar circumstances.

We are indeed more immediately entrusted by the Lord, with the care of

Digitized by Google

our own lives and souls; and required to provide especially for our children and near relatives: and in ordinary cases, we may not be able to shew active love, beyond our own very contracted circle. But universal benevolence will dictate prayers for all men; and on particular occasions we are required to exercise self-denial, and in a measure suspend our kindness to those near to us, that we may avail ourselves of an opportunity to relieve and serve those who are most remote from us.

This love of our neighbour is enforced, under the gospel, by other motives, and admits of other modifications, than are expressly mentioned in the law. Our peculiar relation and obligations to Christ require us to love his people, as our brethren, in an especial manner. "A new commandment," says he, "I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." John xiii. 34, 35. xv. 12. And St John says, it is "the old commandment which was from the beginning:" and yet a new commandment: 1 John ii. 7—11. that is, the old command enforced by new motives, and a recent example, and for other ends than formerly. They, whom we judge to be true believers, are entitled to our most tender affection, most cordial complacency, melting compassion, and self-denying liberal assistance. "Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." They should be our chosen companions, our bosom friends, and dearer to us than any earthly relative, as our brethren in Christ, the objects of his special love, bearing his image, devoted to his service, and fellow-heirs of heavenly felicity. We should labour "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;" to preserve harmony among all that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, however divided by external distinctions; to cast the mantle of love over their infirmities, and to shew an habitual disposition to cultivate peace with them, and do them good. "Hereby we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren:" for we are now especially attached to the very persons, whom we were naturally disposed to despise and dislike. Alas, that this peculiar mark of Christ's true disciples should be so little conspicuous in his visible church!

A conscientious regulation of all our relative affections, and a performance of the duties resulting from them, are next required of us: and when these are attended to from evangelical principles, and according to the precepts of Christ, they are so far from interfering with our love to God and to our neighbour, that they constitute an important part of our obedience in both these respects. Love to particular friends, and gratitude to benefactors, should be so exercised, as to coincide with our general duty: all excessive attachments, as generally understood and celebrated, are partial, exclusive, and idolatrous affections; the love of a man's own image in another person, self-love reflected, or the creature substituted in the place of the Creator. Love of our country likewise, while it consists with love to mankind at large, is love to our neighbour according to the degree of proximity, and may be expressed in seeking the real good of our own nation by every fair and equitable endeavour. But Roman and Grecian patriotism is downright selfishness, a bigotry in benevolence, instead of philanthropy. It is good-will to a few, foolishly seeking their prejudicial aggrandizement, at the expence of the ruin or misery of all the world besides. It is therefore the honour of Christianity, that it makes no mention of so proud, rapacious, and malignant a disposition.

Love to our neighbours as ourselves is also shewn by benevolence and compassion for men of no religion, of false religions, or even of the vilest characters. It forbids us to do them any injury, or to persecute them for their sentiments or practices; or any way to molest them, except as they become obnoxious to punishment for disturbing the peace of the community. We must not needlessly propagate reports to their disadvantage, even if true; much less may we slander and misrepresent them. We ought to watch opportunities of doing them good, and conciliating them by kind usage; not disdaining or despairing of them; but praying and hoping that

Digitized by Google

they may be converted from the evil of their ways, and saved from destruction. And this consists very well with separating from their company, "not bidding them God speed, lest we partake of their evil deeds;" and all other protests which we are commanded to enter against their principles and conduct.

We are even required to love our most virulent and injurious enemies and persecutors, after the example of the Lord's love to us, when rebels against him. Not that we ought to love them more than our friends and brethren; as some have misinterpreted these precepts, that they might oppose them. But we should still bear good-will to our foes, wish them well and pray for them, watch against all resentment, and not suffer ourselves to be overcome with evil, but still strive to overcome evil with good. We ought to keep our hearts diligently, that we may not rejoice either in their crimes, disgrace, or misery; to cultivate compassion for them, especially in respect of their souls; to shew a forbearing, forgiving, and reconcileable disposition; to spare no pains, and grudge no expence or self-denial, in attempting to do them good; and to seize on every opportunity of relieving their temporal distresses, in order to make way for seeking their more important advantage. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. In these cases, we should be ready to relieve the most wicked and ungrateful; but in ordinary circumstances, our brethren and friends have a prior claim to our special kindness; even as our heavenly Father causes the "sun to shine and the rain to descend on the wicked and ungrateful;" but reserves his peculiar blessings for his children.

The example of the Lord's love to us when enemies, every part of the plan of redemption, the ministry of reconciliation, and the past and present kindness of our God to his believing servants, furnish motives and arguments for the constant practice of all those loving dispositions, and that peaceable and affectionate conduct, which are indispensably required of Christ's disciples, as the only sure evidence that they are true believers, and that their sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

Let us compare these things with the apostle's description of love, as stated in the context. "Love," says he, "suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; does not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." St Paul doubtless spake of love to men for the Lord's sake: love expressed both by doing and suffering; love to both their bodies and souls: a patient, long-suffering, unostentatious, disinterested, prudent, modest, unsuspicious, condescending, self-denying, forgiving, and fervent affection to our neighbours and brethren, expressed in the persevering use of every means suited to do them good; and unwearied by suffering or ill-usage in seeking to accomplish this benevolent and compassionate object. Next to the example of Christ, the conduct of the apostle himself forms undoubtedly the best exposition of his language, that was ever yet given.

II. Then we proceed very briefly to shew, in what respects love is greater than faith and hope; and how this consists with the doctrine of justification and salvation by faith alone.

Love is greater than faith and hope, because it constitutes the end for which they are appointed and rendered effectual. "The end of the commandment," or the message of the gospel, "is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." 1 Tim. i. 5. It is the design of the whole gospel, to recover men from a state of apostacy, enmity, selfishness, and malignity, to that love of God and man, which the law commands; and to induce them, by obligations of inestimable value, and by new principles implanted in the heart, to express that love in all their tempers

Digitized by Google

and conduct. This salvation purchased by the blood of Christ, can only be perceived and applied by *faith*; and the completion of it is the object of *hope*; but *love* is the disposition, health, and felicity, to which man must be restored, in connection with forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. It is the prize itself, of which faith and hope must gradually put us in possession. In proportion as we love, we "dwell in God, and God in us;" we anticipate heaven, and possess the blessing: for God is Love, and heaven is love. A magnificent edifice cannot be erected without scaffolding; yet the building is greater than the scaffolding, being the sole end for which it is necessary: and when it is finished, the scaffolding is removed as an useless incumbrance.

Love will endure for ever; but faith and hope will soon be swallowed up in sight and enjoyment. In heaven they will be no longer wanted, but love will there be perfected; and every alloy of envy, selfishness, prejudice, or aversion removed: every uneasy, self-denying exercise changed for such as are most delightful; and all coldness and deficiency remedied. The blessed inhabitants will love God with their whole souls, and each other as themselves; and the felicity of every individual will increase the joy of all the rest. Love must therefore be greater than faith and hope; because more excellent in its nature, and more enduring in its use. The two latter are only necessary in this introductory scene, though honourable to God, and profitable to us in the highest degree: but the former will flourish for ever; the business, element, joy, and glory of heaven itself; uniting God and all holy creatures in the most perfect harmony and felicity. Col. iii. 14.

Yet love cannot perform the functions of faith or hope, any more than the eye can perform the office of the ear, or the hand that of the foot. However excellent, it can do nothing towards justifying a sinner. The little measure of it to which we here attain, can neither reverse the curse of the broken law, nor form our bond of union with Christ, that we may be justified "in that righteousness of God, which is upon all, and unto all that believe." Even were our love perfected, previous to justification, it could not atone for past sins, nor merit everlasting life; but in fact it is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and the seal of our gratuitous justification. The Scripture instructions concerning love, when duly considered, prove our need of this free salvation: and the measure of it to which we are restored, is a part of that salvation, and an earnest and evidence of the whole. It is therefore very obvious to see, that love is greater than faith or hope; that "we are" nevertheless "saved by grace, through faith;" and that "he who believeth shall be saved, and he who believeth not shall be damned."

My brethren, let us learn from this important subject, not to oppose one part of Scripture to another, as many fatally do. That apparent love, which does not spring from faith, and is not accompanied by repentance, humility, hope, patience, and other holy dispositions, is a counterfeit: and so is the faith that does not work by love, and the hope which does not purify the heart. That love to our neighbour, which is not the result of love to Christ, is not the love which the sacred writers extol: nor can we love the bodies of men aright, if we neglect their souls; or regard their souls, if we do not relieve their temporal wants, as we have opportunity and ability.

While we hold fast the principles of the gospel, let us beware of barren notions, spiritual pride, and a vain-glorious use of our endowments. These may be splendid in the judgment of man: but they are nothing, and worse than nothing, in the sight of God. A bitter, boasting, and censorious zeal, characterises "the wisdom that is from beneath; and is earthly, sensual, and devilish:" not that "which is from above, and is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." James iii. 13—18. Let us then, my brethren, follow after love: but let us see to it that it be the genuine affection, the nature and effects of which the Scripture describes, and which connects the various parts of Christianity into one consistent whole.

Digitized by Google

We may likewise observe, that the least degree of those holy tempers, which are common to believers, is inconceivably more valuable to the possessor, than those shining gifts or accomplishments, by which some are distinguished, but which may exist without living faith. Such were the gifts of tongues and prophecy, miraculous powers, or apostolical authority, which might be separated from saving grace: and such are learning, genius, eloquence, and other admired endowments, which men covet, envy, or ostentatiously display.

But next to the possession of those holy dispositions which inseparably accompany salvation, we should desire and seek such gifts as may qualify us for the duties of our several stations; and we should pray earnestly, that "Our love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and in all judgment; that we may approve things that are excellent; that we may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ: being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God." Phil. i. 9—11.

SERMON XV.

PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1796.

ON THE CELEBRATION OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

LUKE, II. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.

ST. Paul having said, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh," adds among other things, that he "was seen of angels." These heavenly worshippers saw the Lord of glory, their Creator and Sovereign, clothed with human flesh, and laid as an infant in a manger: they saw him tempted by the devil in the wilderness, and ministered to him, when he had overcome the enemy; they were spectators of his transfiguration on the mount, and his agony in the garden: they beheld him expire on the cross, attended his glorious resurrection and ascension; and when he was exalted in human nature to the mediatorial throne, they did him homage, and joined the redeemed in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Rev. v. 9—14. For when the Father "bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Heb. i. 6. Finally, they will be attendant and ministering servants, when Christ shall come to raise the dead, and judge the world.

In taking occasion from the present festival, to discourse on a subject with which we should be conversant at every season of the year, I shall,

I. Make some remarks on the event celebrated by the heavenly host.

II. Explain the song of exalted praise and adoration.

III. Endeavour to bring the matter home to ourselves by some practical deductions.

And may the Lord himself direct and bless our meditations; that we may

Digitized by Google

be animated and assisted in "keeping a day unto the Lord," after a holy and heavenly manner; and not in conformity to the corrupt and carnal fashion of those, who turn a Christian solemnity into a bacchanalian carnival!

I. Let us reflect on the event which was celebrated by the heavenly host. A poor woman, named Mary, of the family of David, espoused to a carpenter residing at Nazareth, a place branded with infamy, came with her husband to Bethlehem, in obedience to a decree of Cæsar Augustus, and there being "no room *for them* in the inn," which was occupied by superior people, they were lodged in a stable. In this situation, Mary was delivered of a son whom she wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.—Nothing at first sight appears remarkable in this event, except the extremely mean and inconvenient accommodation made for the poor woman and her infant; and the unfeeling neglect shewn to a person in her circumstances by the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Indeed the affair seems scarcely to have been noticed in that city; and we do not find that it was heard of at Jerusalem, till the child was presented at the temple, according to the law of Moses, when a few persons of eminent piety were made acquainted with it. The rulers, scribes, and priests in general, knew nothing of these transactions; till wise men from the east came to inquire after the new born king, and to do him homage. Then indeed a considerable degree of attention was excited; and the tyrant Herod caused the infants about Bethlehem to be cruelly murdered, in hopes of destroying one, whom he dreaded as the rival of his authority. Soon after, however, the report seems to have been forgotten. The child born at Bethlehem was brought up at Nazareth with Joseph the carpenter, and doubtless earned his bread at that laborious trade; till at length he entered on his public ministry, which he closed by an ignominious death upon a cross. Thus "he grew up before the Lord as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form or comeliness, and when the people saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him: he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Isaiah liii. 2, 3. And if the Jews knew little of the infant at Bethlehem, and the carpenter's son at Nazareth; the Gentile rulers, conquerors, and philosophers, were still more entirely unacquainted with him. All over the earth, which he came to bless, he was disregarded or despised; yet angels witnessed and celebrated his birth with admiring songs of praise!

These blessed spirits, free from guilt, and perfect in holiness, wanted not a Saviour. They "excel in strength," and do the Lord's commandments, hearkening to the voice of his words." Psal. ciii. 20. Their capacities for wisdom and understanding are very great; their judgment and taste for what is beautiful and glorious are exactly conformable to those of the holy God whom they adore: and the hope of being at length made like them, and equal to them, should excite a noble ambition and emulation in every human heart. But the event which had taken place at Bethlehem, and which we this day commemorate, appeared to them of the greatest possible importance, and worthy to be celebrated with their most rapturous adorations.

In the infant laid in the manger they recognized the Seed of the woman, the spotless offspring of a virgin mother, who was to come and "bruise the serpent's head;" and "the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed." They knew that Mary was come to Bethlehem, according to the purpose of God, that the ancient prophecy might be fulfilled. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah v. 2. They saw "the Desire of all nations," actually come; Hagai ii. 7, and they celebrated the accomplishment of Isaiah's prediction, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Isaiah, ix. 6. One of the company

Digitized by Google

therefore said to the poor shepherds, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." They could not say, "*Unto us* a child is born, *unto us* a Son is given:" "for verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." Heb. ii. 14—16. He came into the world to be a Saviour: he was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; yea, he was "The Lord," "The second man is the Lord from heaven." His name is "Emmanuel:" for "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."

"The WORD, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God," by whom "all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made," "was now made flesh and dwelt among us;" and angels first beheld "his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." John i. 1—14. They saw him, "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God," make himself of no reputation, take upon him the form of a servant, and the likeness of man; that being found in fashion as a man, he might become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. ii. 6—8. With astonishment they witnessed him, "by whom all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers;—for whom all things are created;—and by whom all things consist:" they witnessed this glorious Creator and Lord of all "come in the flesh;" that he might be the visible of the invisible God; and as Head of the church, inherit all things, and have in all respects the pre-eminence: "for it pleased the Lord that in him should all fulness dwell." Col. i. 15—19. Heb. i. 1—4.

Into "these things the angels desire to look:" here they contemplate with fixed attention and unwearied admiration: for they behold "in the church the manifold wisdom of God." The heavenly host knew who the infant in the manger was, and for what ends he came: they were ready to adore the Child born as the mighty God: they recognized their Creator and Lord under this disguise; and with good old Simeon, they viewed him as "the Light of the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel."

In this humble scene they saw the opening of that grand design, which had been shadowed forth by the ceremonies of the law, and of which the prophets from the beginning had excited the highest expectations: that design which had been obscurely intimated when Adam sinned, and gradually unfolding for about four thousand years. "The great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh;" now actually realized, called forth the amazement, and enlivened the affections of these heavenly worshippers, and dictated that zealous song of adoring praise, which is the subject of our present meditation.

II. Then we proceed to explain the song itself. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men." The angels celebrated the praises of God, and congratulated the happiness of man, with most fervent love and joy. "To you," O ye sons of men, "is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord:" we exult in your felicity, we rejoice over one sinner that repenteth: "how much greater then must be our joy and gladness at the nativity of Him who is come to stoop, suffer, and die, that he may be exalted as a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins?"

It is very affecting to compare the conduct of the heavenly host, in this respect, with that of men in general, who neglect or oppose the message of salvation, and despise the glorious Redeemer. But angels know our real character and condition: while we are naturally blinded with pride and prejudice, and will not be convinced that we deserve destruction! Or we are so taken up with "the world, and the things that are in the world," that we disregard the important interests of eternity!

In considering the hymn of praise before us, we may perhaps begin to best

Digitized by Google

advantage with the concluding sentence, "Good-will to men."—The blessed angels had witnessed the creation of the earth, when these morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" Job, xxxviii. 7. for in that august transaction they saw the immensity of their Creator's power, wisdom, and goodness. With astonishment and awe they beheld also the fall of their compeers, and when "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment," 2 Pet. ii. 4. they adored his righteous severity against the rebellious, and his holy abhorrence of sin; and they received instruction of inestimable value from the impressive solemn scene. They saw too the fall of man; and probably expected that vengeance would, with unabated vehemence, seize in like manner upon him: not conceiving that a God of infinite purity and justice could possibly shew mercy and kindness to rebels and apostates. No doubt they heard the first intimation of favour to our offending parents, mixed with the solemn denunciation of death, and all the woes that preceded it: and this must have excited a peculiar attention to so new and interesting a discovery of the divine perfections.

From that crisis, they had been witnesses and messengers, both of the Lord's mercy and indignation towards the human race. Numerous opportunities had been afforded them, in the history of mankind, of learning the fatal effects of transgression, and the power of divine wrath. The deluge; the tremendous doom of Sodom and Gomorrah; the desolations of Egypt; the severities inflicted on the devoted Canaanites; the judgments executed even on offending Israel, in the wilderness and Canaan, and by the Babylonish captivity; were so many illustrations of the justice of God, and his holy abhorrence of iniquity. But at the same time his patience and bounty towards sinful men, his gracious interpositions in behalf of his people, the intimations and predictions of a Saviour, the promises given to believers, and the actual salvation of numbers, showed his good-will to mankind; and his readiness to pity, help and relieve them, as far as could consist with the honour of his name, and the interests of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

Yet in the infant lying in the manger at Bethlehem, the angels had such a discovery of the Lord's *good-will to men*, connected with his detestation of their sins, as had never hitherto attracted their notice or raised their expectations. They no doubt before this had some general conception of the plan formed by infinite wisdom and everlasting love: perhaps the whole had been fully notified to them. Yet when the stupendous design was thus far accomplished, their previous admiration of the ineffable condescension, compassion, and love of the holy and glorious Lord God towards lost sinners, whose multiplied and heinous crimes had so long called loudly for vengeance, was far exceeded, and as it were swallowed up in inexpressible astonishment. Good-will to man! to guilty, polluted, ungrateful man! to idolatrous, impious, and blaspheming man! This overwhelmed the blessed angels with amazement, and tuned their hearts to adoring praises: and these reflections must have the same effect on all, who have just views of the majesty and glorious holiness of God, the nature and desert of sin, and the wonderful plan of redemption.—"God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Rom. v. 6—10. 1 John iv. 10.

This good-will of God to men is mere compassion and benevolence, not approbation or complacency. The crimes, dispositions, and characters of the creatures thus beloved, were unspeakably hateful in his holy eyes: and none of his protestations against sin are so decided and energetic, as that which principally declares his love to sinners. The compassion and tenderness, which induce virtuous and pious persons, at great expence to relieve those pitiable objects, whose crimes have rendered them miserable; in order that an attempt may be made to rescue them from temporal and eternal ruin,

Digitized by Google

form a feeble reflection of the love shewn by our God to sinners, in giving his Son to be their Saviour, even while he declares them to be deserving of his everlasting wrath and abhorrence. The heinousness of our crimes, the contrariety of our dispositions to the divine purity, the great things he hath done to make way for our salvation, and the inestimable blessings prepared for us, combine to illustrate the riches of his mercy, and the immensity of his goodness. The love of the Father, in giving his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; the love of the Son in most willingly assuming our nature, that he might give himself a sacrifice for our sins; and the love of the Spirit, in preparing our hearts to receive this salvation, and in making us meet for the heavenly inheritance, demand our warmest gratitude and most fervent praises; while we give glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, into whose name we were baptized.

Before the coming of Christ, the special tokens of the Lord's good-will to men were principally confined to the people of Israel; and he had suffered all other nations to walk in their own ways. But in the child born at Bethlehem, the angels saw him who was appointed for salvation to the ends of the earth. The partition wall was about to be removed; the good tidings of a Saviour, even Christ the Lord, were speedily to be proclaimed to all people without distinction; and thus a proposal of mercy and every blessing, "without money and without price," would be made to persons of all characters and descriptions, not excepting the vilest. Nay, all men every where would be commanded to repent; and the ambassadors of Christ, would in his stead, and as if God besought them by their mouth, beseech them to be reconciled to God. The fullest assurances were thus about to be given, that the loving Saviour would reject none, on any account whatever, who came to him for life and godliness; and exceeding great and precious promises, together with the institution of sacred ordinances as *means of grace*, would concur in encouraging sinners of every nation to seek the blessings of eternal life, without fearing a denial or disappointment. All this, doubtless, and far more was perceived by the heavenly host, when they proclaimed "Good-will to men" in celebrating the nativity of our Emmanuel!

They sang also, "Peace on earth." They had witnessed the fatal effects of the creature's venturing to oppose the Creator's will, and become his enemies. They had seen angels, as it were, declare war against the Almighty; and even when cast out of heaven, employing all their liberty in carrying on the same desperate and ruinous hostilities. They beheld man seduced to join the apostate rebels, and become enemies to God by wicked works; and then instigated by enmity to increasing iniquity. The earth filled with tears, groans, and miseries; the universal victory and triumph of death and the grave, and the subsequent doom of impenitent and unreconciled sinners, were the consequences, which angels had witnessed of man's infatuated contest against his omnipotent Creator.—They had been spectators likewise of all the cruel wars, which men in every age had been waging against each other; and of all the dire effects of ambition, envy, revenge, and insatiable rapacity or cruelty, from the day when Cain, the first murderer, imbrued his hands in his brother's blood. What then must have been the sentiments and feeling of these benevolent spirits, while witnessing the murders, massacres, battles, sieges, and persecutions, which have wasted the human species, and increased the miseries of the world to a degree that exceeds all calculation? What did they think of the lavish encomiums, bestowed almost unanimously, on the most skilful, prosperous, and unfeeling of these butchers of mankind? What estimate did they form of man's heart, and of the vaunted dignity of human nature, the milk of human kindness, and the sufficiency of reason to guide us to virtue and happiness? Beholding incessantly these horrid spectacles, what could holy angels think of man but that he was, as it were, a younger brother of the original murderer, delighting in the same work, and deeming no other employment so honourable? What could they think of the earth, but that it was in many respects a counterpart of hell; and that

Digitized by Google

it would have been so more entirely, had it not been for the good-will of God to men?

I mean not, my brethren, to declaim against the profession of arms, or to condemn all rulers and nations that engage in war. Some soldiers have been, and some are Christians; but their profession is their cross, and its duties their self-denial; they would not willingly engage in any war of ambition, rapacity, or revenge; but they readily face danger and endure hardship in defence of their country. The more we hate war, and long for peace, the greater are our obligations to such men, as thus expose themselves to guard us against injurious assailants, and the more fervently we ought to pray for their protection and success. In the present state of the world, war is a necessary evil, and often quite unavoidable; and that not merely when a nation is directly attacked; for there are many other ways, by which the rapacious and ambitious may render a neighbouring country incapable of defending its liberties and possessions; and these can only be counteracted by vigorous opposition. Nor are private individuals generally competent to decide what wars are necessary and justifiable, or the contrary: in this respect rulers must give an account to God for their conduct. But wars proceed originally from the lusts of men's hearts, James iv. 1. and from the wicked one: God employs them as he does hurricanes, earthquakes, or pestilences, as executioners of his vengeance on guilty nations: and ambitious conquerors, however accomplished or illustrious, are the most hateful and tremendous scourges of our apostate race. We may therefore deprecate and denounce war itself, as the most horrid and atrocious evil, consistently with the obedience and honour due to our rulers, and the most sincere prayers for the success of their measures, as far as they tend to the protection and welfare of our beloved country. But we must also maintain, that all the blood shed in war is murder, chargeable on them, whose criminal projects and politics render such dreadful methods of resisting them necessary; and that it will certainly be required at *their* hands, on which side soever the victims were slaughtered.

But to return from this digression; when Christ was born, angels sang, "Peace on earth." Peace between God and sinners; peace between a man and his neighbour: peace between contending nations; peace in the heart and conscience, and peace throughout the earth. The Saviour is the Prince of peace; the true Melchisedeck king of Salem, the King of righteousness and the King of peace: "and of his government and peace there shall be no end." The gospel is "the word of reconciliation," ministers are ambassadors of peace, through the great Mediator between God and man. Into whatever house the apostles entered, they were directed to say "Peace be to this house:" and wherever we are sent, we go "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." "He is our Peace, he hath made peace by the blood of his cross;" and he hath pronounced a blessing on peace-makers as the children of God.

When we embrace his gospel, "being justified by faith we have peace with God;" he imputes not to us our trespasses, but admits us into a state of reconciliation and a covenant of friendship with himself; and by the Spirit of sanctification and adoption, teaches and inclines us cordially to love him, and delight in his perfections, service, and salvation. Peace is the legacy Christ hath left his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." John xiv. 27. When our hearts are stayed on the Lord in faith and hope, he keeps them in "perfect peace," and he imparts a peace of God "which passeth all understanding" to possess and confirm "our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." A stable peace of conscience, in reliance on the immense and everlasting mercy of God, through the all-sufficient atonement and mediation of Christ; which will bear investigation, and flourish in connection with deep humility, holy abhorrence of sin, and the strictest conscientiousness in all things; and an inward serenity and tranquillity of mind, in submission to the will of God and confidence in him, constitute this inestimable blessing.

Digitized by Google

The Lord hath also assured us, that "when our ways please him, he maketh even our enemies to be at peace with us:" and his peace ruling in our hearts disposes us to follow peace with all men. The precepts as well as the promises of Christ, insure peace to all his true disciples. The most sincere, upright, disinterested, and harmless conduct, united with tender compassion, courteousness and universal benevolence: a disposition to make concessions and reparations for all injuries, and to forgive and love our enemies in the most unwearied and generous manner, are expresly commanded by the Redeemer; and these are also "the fruits of the Spirit," who dwells in all true believers. The most exact attention to all relative duties, according to the regular subordination of families and communities, is also effectually provided for. If therefore all men should at once be made true Christians, answerable to the specimen shewn to the world after the day of Pentecost; nay, according to that lower measure of grace bestowed on thousands in this land at present: the effect upon human affairs would be as stupendous, as that produced on the boisterous winds and stormy waves, when the incarnate Son of God said, "Peace, be still, and there was a great calm!" Wars and all concurrent and similar evils must instantaneously cease, and peace, equity, purity, truth, and love universally prevail; if all men were partakers of the Spirit of Christ, and obedient to his commandments.

But hath not he said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three." Luke xii. 51—53. To this it may be answered, that predictions of future events must be distinguished from commands, exhortations, and doctrines: and the latter, not the former, show the real nature and tendency of the gospel. When a few persons are converted, and feel their obligations to love Christ more than father or mother, and to obey God rather than man; and many remain under the influence of that spirit who worketh in the children of disobedience: divisions will necessarily be the consequence. And when the mad passions of ungodly men take occasion from Christianity, to vent themselves; and the distinction between real believers, and nominal Christians, is overlooked; the tendency of the gospel must be mistaken. The opposition which the religion of Jesus has met with from the world; the wickedness that men have committed, under the guise of Christianity; and the inconsistency and indiscretions of many pious persons, have produced lamentable effects. Hence persecutions and religious wars have been excited, by the professed disciples of the Prince of peace! *Pious*, or rather *impious*, frauds have been practised to subserve the cause of superstition or hypocrisy! Acrimonious controversies and divisions among professed Christians have been multiplied; and even serious persons have been prejudiced against each other by a narrow and absurd bigotry. "Woe be to the world because of offences; it must needs be that offences come; but woe be to that man by whom they come."

We must not, however, ascribe these things to Christianity; but to the want of it. If men were *real* Christians most of these evils would cease, and all of them would be mitigated: if men were consistent and judicious Christians, they would totally vanish. Even the disciples too often "know not what spirit they are of;" and contend for the truths and ordinances of Christ, in a manner contrary to his precepts and example.

But it may also be observed, that all these effects spring from the depravity of the human heart as their native source; and if men had not this occasion of discord and selfishness, they would find some other. After all, the world has seldom been more wicked in the worst ages and places distinguished by the Christian name; than at other times and in other countries; though unbelievers have bestowed more pains in exhibiting its wickedness. In general the state of human society has been greatly meliorated by the gospel: for where have Christians habitually diverted themselves by such bloody spectacles, as the gladiatorial shows of the Romans? Where

Digitized by Google

have Pagans manifested such humanity to the poor, sick, and destitute, as is displayed in the expensive institutions common in Christian countries? Vices, branded with deepest infamy, even in this licentious age, were patronized and avowed among the politest heathens! War itself has assumed a milder aspect since the establishment of Christianity: and even Deists have learned from the sacred oracles, to denounce ambitious warriors, and to give the palm of glory to those who save men's lives, instead of those that destroy them. These effects have evidently been produced by the gospel, even on the minds of multitudes, who never believed it with a living and obedient faith.

Taking, however, our standard of Christianity from the Scriptures, we are confident, that in proportion as it prevails, it will produce "peace on earth," in all senses and in all places. We are also assured, that ere long the Prince of peace will possess the dominion over all nations as his willing subjects: and then they will beat their swords into plough-shares, and learn war no more. Well, therefore, might angels sing at the Redeemer's nativity. "Peace on earth!" A blessing inestimable in itself, long unknown, or scarcely known, among men: but now about to be vouchsafed by a grádual progress to all the nations of the globe!

For such blessings virtually communicated to sinful men in the person of Emmanuel, angels also ascribed "Glory to God in the highest."—The perfections of God are his essential glory, which is incapable of increase or diminution: but in his works he manifests this glory to his rational creatures, that they may contemplate, admire, and adore it; and he is glorified by them, when they delight to celebrate his praises. "The heavens declare the glory of God:" and his eternal power and deity are clearly seen in all the works which he made. His providential care of the universe manifests his wisdom, goodness, and bounty: his awful justice and holiness are displayed in his perfect law and righteous judgments, and his patience and kindness even to sinners may be learned from his dealings with our fallen race in general. These glories the heavenly host had witnessed and celebrated for four thousand years.

But the birth of the infant in the stable, viewed in its causes and consequences, discovered to them glories so resplendent, that in some respects they eclipsed all former displays; and with rapturous joy and admiration they sang, "Glory to God in the highest:" in the highest heavens among all its exalted inhabitants, and in the loftiest strains, which people can possibly reach. Here the glories of the divine justice, holiness, truth, wisdom, knowledge, power, love, and mercy, which they had viewed separately in other objects, shone forth with collected beams in most adorable beauty and splendour. The perfections, which before appeared irreconcileable, now harmonized, and reflected glory upon each other. The distinct honours of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were displayed at once to their admiring view. And as they were always ready, with glowing love, zeal, and gratitude, to celebrate the high praises of the Lord: so they were peculiarly excited to this reasonable and delightful service, on this interesting occasion. Never did Jehovah appear in all respects so glorious in holiness, justice, truth, and wisdom; as in his wonderful love to Adam's guilty polluted race. If God so hate sin, that his well-beloved Son shall become man, and bear the curse, rather than it shall go unpunished; and yet so love sinners, as to employ such an expedient, rather than leave them to perish without remedy; if his wisdom could form such a plan of reconciling justice and mercy, and of taking occasion from sin itself to glorify his name in the most distinguished manner; and if his faithfulness accomplish such a promise, as that relating to the incarnation of his own Son for these most gracious purposes; how transcendently glorious must He be! How worthy of universal love and adoration! Let all creatures then say, "Glory to God in the highest."

Angels "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth;" because every event of this nature is a new display of the divine glory in the work of redemption;

Digitized by Google

a new trophy of the Redeemer's beneficent victories; a new worshipper to join the heavenly choir to all eternity; and a new instrument to excite other sinners to seek for the same blessings.—For alas! men are blind, willingly blind, to the glory of God in all respects! Even the displays of his being and perfections in the works of creation fail of suitably affecting their hearts; "they glorify him not as God, neither are thankful." But the gospel, professed, adorned, and preached in the world, calls their attention to an interesting subject: and when "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 4—6. that light is reflected as it were on every other object; and we learn by degrees to glorify God, for all the displays he hath made of himself; and as a spiritual priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Thus sinners on earth are trained up for the worship of heaven; of which the highest and most delightful strain will be, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God with his blood;" "Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb." Hallelujah. Amen.—The adoring praises of the heavenly host may therefore be also considered, as an affectionate expression of their longing desire, that by the gospel of Christ, the divine glory might fill the earth as well as heaven; while peace with God and with each other should be enjoyed by all its inhabitants, through the adorable good-will shewn to guilty man.

III. Then let us endeavour to bring this matter home to ourselves by some practical deductions.

We may learn from this subject how insignificant all earthly distinctions are, in the judgement of the heavenly host. They see no glory in them, nor dishonour in the want of them. The Lord of all descends to dwell on earth, to be a Prince and Saviour: and angels celebrate the august event, the most important that had ever occurred from the beginning of the world. But he appears not in an imperial palace, or with the appendages of royalty; but in a stable, and laid in a manger! And let us not forget, that this was the settled purpose of unchangeable wisdom and everlasting love; in order to pour contempt on all that splendour, which we are prone no idolize.

Not only are *vanity and vexation* inscribed on the pomp, wealth, and luxuries of the world, by this remarkable appointment; but they are pronounced mean, ensnaring, and polluting. We should therefore inquire how far our judgment coincides in this respect, with that of angels, and the Lord of angels? The rich and noble should remember, that their distinctions are as withering flowers; at the same time that they are talents entrusted to their stewardship, of which a strict account will shortly be demanded. Let them not then "be high-minded, or trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God." "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches." Yea, "God forbid that" any of us "should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world." Jer. ix. 23, 24. Gal. vi. 14. We should well consider the words of the apostle, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low." James, i. 9—11. "Mind not then," my brethren, "high things, but condescend to men of low estate:" cultivate humility, courteousness, indifference about the world, and self-denying beneficence, in the midst of abundance: this will abate envy, secure you from the snares and perils of your situation, and render the talents entrusted to you a blessing to many, and more abundantly to yourselves. "How hardly," says our Lord, "shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" But "the things that are impossible with men are possible with Him." Yet this consideration, should exite in you peculiar caution, watchfulness, and prayer, that your riches may not prove the ruin of your immortal souls.

Think, my brethren, of the stable, the carpenter's shop, the feast on barley

Digitized by Google

bread and small fishes, the well in Samaria, and of Him who had not where to lay his head; that you may learn not to despise the poor, lest you reproach your Maker and disdain the Saviour of the world. Heavenly glory and excellency may be clad in coarse raiment, or lodged in a mean cottage. Learn not to judge of men by outward appearance; but to estimate characters according to their intrinsic worth: and let it not be thought any disparagement to prefer the company of pious Christians, who are almost as poor as their Master chose to be, above that of the most accomplished persons who are strangers to his saving grace.

And, my brethren of low degree, let me exhort you to be contented and patient in your humble condition; watch against envy, repining, covetings, and distrust. Seek the true riches, the ornament which in the sight of God is of great price, the honour that cometh from Him, and the pure pleasures which he bestows. With these, the meanest accommodations will make your hearts thankful: and if your children be poorly provided for, and you are overlooked in times of difficulty by your neighbours; think of the virgin mother and her holy infant in the stable; reflect on your sinfulness; and instead of murmuring, lift up your hearts in joyful thanksgivings: for few of you are so poor as the divine Saviour of sinners was during the whole of his humiliation.

But, my friends, what do you think of this lowly Redeemer? Do your ideas of his dignity, excellency, love, and salvation, accord to the views of these holy angels? Or do you see in him no form or comeliness; nor any beauty for which you should desire him? Do you heartily sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good-will towards men?" Or is there nothing in this great event to exite your attention and admiration? You can never be meet for the joys of heaven, unless you learn on earth to see and admire the glories of redeeming love. The songs of angels would grate in your ears, and discompose your hearts; were it possible for you to enter the mansions of the blessed, without having felt your need of a Saviour, and acquired a disposition to love and adore him. And how will the conduct of angels, who though they never sinned, and need no pardoning mercy or renewing grace, yet glorify God with all their powers, for his love to fallen men, rise up in judgment against the ingratitude and perverseness of perishing sinners, who make the very condescension of Emmanuel the pretence for refusing him the glory due to his name?

Let us also inquire, how far we resemble these heavenly worshippers in the temper of our minds. Exalted and holy as they are, they despise not sinful worms, dwelling in houses of clay; while they adored the Son of God, as tabernacling in human flesh, and thus "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." They complain not, of the special honour shewn to worthless man, by this union of the Diety with our nature, and not with theirs: they are not reluctant to our felicity, and object not to our being made equal with them. Yea, they willingly and joyfully minister to the heirs of salvation, in the meanest cottage, work-house, or dungeon; nor do they deem the poorest believer an unmeet object of their condescending and compassionate services.—This is genuine excellency: but have we been taught to resemble and imitate them? Are we thus attentive to the needy, ready to sympathize with the afflicted, and freed from selfishness, envy, and contempt of inferiors? Above all, let us remember and imitate "the grace of the Lord Jesus, who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor; that we, through his poverty might be made rich." He hath said, "The poor ye have always with you; and when ye will ye may do good to them." He hath appointed his needy disciples to be his representatives and receivers; that in supplying their wants we may express our love and gratitude to Him, and copy his most endearing example.

This season is generally attended with an interruption of secular business, and some additional expence; yet the time and money are generally worse than thrown away: while professed Christians, like Israel worshipping the

Digitized by Google

golden calf, "sit down to eat, and drink, and rise up to play." But if we have a spiritual taste, and judge as angels do; we shall rather abridge ourselves of customary indulgences, than "make provision for the flesh," when commemorating the humble birth of the self-denying Saviour. We shall express our joy, and employ our leisure, in acts of solemn worship and grateful praises: and instead of expensive feasts for the wealthy; we shall abound in hospitality and kindness to the poor, and be glad to contribute to promote the cause for which the Son of God became incarnate.

The sensual and ungodly mirth of vast multitudes, at this festival, is madness! They abound in the works of the devil, because the Son of God was manifested to destroy them! When the very event thus commemorated, will increase the weight of their condemnation; unless they can be persuaded to follow the apostle's counsel, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." James, iv. 7—10.

But "let the heart of those rejoice that seek the Lord." Let the poor in spirit, the weeping penitent, take encouragement, from the astonishing instance of the Lord's good-will to sinful men, this day commemorated. And let all, that have tasted this grace, and can rejoice in the love of God our Saviour, remember that they are subjects to the Prince of peace; that they may be animated to pray for universal peace, and by all suitable means, to follow after peace, to seek the peace of the church, and the peace of the world; and by well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

SERMON XVI.

PREACHED JANUARY 1, 1786.

GOODNESS OF PROVIDENCE AN EXCITEMENT TO GRATITUDE.

1 SAMUEL, VII. 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

FROM the calling of Abraham, to the time of Samuel, the Lord had shewn peculiar favours of inestimable value to his chosen people. Especially "He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he dealt not so with any nation, and as for his judgments they had not known them." Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. But they had always manifested a perverse and ungrateful disposition, and were continually provoking him with their idolatries and rebellions.—"Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance: and he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought in subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him by their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry." Psalm cvi. 40—44.

Phineas and Hophni, the priests, the sons of Eli, had by their wickedness caused a most deplorable prevalence of impiety among the people: this pro-

Digitized by Google

voked God to deliver them into the hands of the Philistines, who carried off the ark of the covenant, which had been presumptuously brought into the field of battle. For the Lord was able to vindicate his own glory, and to honour that symbol of his gracious presence even among his avowed enemies, without countenancing the vain confidence of his hypocritical worshippers. The Philistines were soon constrained to restore the ark; but while it was neglected in Israel, they retained their superiority over that nation. During the space of twenty years, Samuel, who at the beginning of these troubles was a very young man, seems to have laboured with zealous and unwearied diligence, in bringing the people to repentance, and reviving true religion among them. At the end of this time it is said, "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The narrative of the subsequent reformation is indeed very brief; yet there is reason to conclude, that it was one of the most signal revivals of vital godliness, that stands upon record: for "the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only."

A general assembly was convened at Mizpeh, where Samuel was publicly owned as judge of Israel: while they were earnestly seeking the Lord with fasting, prayer, and other religious observances, the Philistines, jealous of their proceedings, marched directly to attack them. But in answer to the earnest prayers of Samuel and the people, these formidable enemies were entirely defeated. And on this memorable occasion, "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." He set up a monument of God's kindness to Israel, (not of Israel's triumph over the Philistines;) to perpetuate the memory of his gracious interposition in their behalf, and to declare their gratitude to future generations.

The history of Israel may be considered as the Lord's experimental trial of human nature. The experiments of the chymist on an ounce of gold or mercury, when properly repeated and established, authorize general conclusions concerning the properties of all the gold or mercury in the world. Thus the dealings of the Lord with Israel, as a specimen of the human race, when rightly understood, warrant general conclusions concerning the dispositions and propensities of all mankind: for the whole is, as it were, one mass, and has the same nature and properties. It is therefore mere self-flattery to suppose, that we should have acted better than they did, if we had been left to ourselves in exactly the same circumstances: and it is a vulgar prejudice to imagine that the Israelites were more wicked than other nations. Their history was more impartially written, and their conduct tried by a stricter rule: in all other respects the records of any country tend to establish the same conclusions concerning human nature.

The history of the visible church in every age entirely coincides with that of the Israelites: special mercies conferred; base ingratitude and rebellion; severe chastisements, and the triumph of cruel enemies; humiliation and revivals of religion, followed by gracious providential deliverances, form the compendium of the whole: but "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," and "the gates of hell have not prevailed."—The experience likewise of believers harmonizes in many respects with the records of Israel: and it is therefore peculiarly useful, to review with care and attention, at stated times, all the Lord's dealings with us, and our conduct towards him: "For hitherto hath he helped us."—To assist such a review, at the entrance of another year, will be the object of the present discourse: in which I shall consider,

I. The import of the words "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us;" and some particulars to which they may be referred.

II. Inquire what is meant by "Setting up an Eben-ezer," according to the common, and not improper use of the expression.

I. The import of the words, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," and some particulars to which they may be referred.

Digitized by Google

I. The Lord hath hitherto helped us all in his superintending providence. We came into the world indigent and helpless: our wants were numerous and urgent, and we were utterly incapable of making any provision for them. All these wants the Lord alone supplied; and others were merely the instruments by which he conferred his bounty. Numbers die in infancy, because they are not properly taken care of and provided for: but we were preserved; and in the kindness of parents or friends, as well as in the ability given them to supply us with all things needful, we experienced, and should acknowledge, the Lord's distinguishing goodness. The possession and continued use of our limbs, senses, and faculties; the measure and peculiarity of our natural abilities; and the advantages of our education, by which we were severally brought into our present comfortable way of subsistence: as well as the possessions which in different ways have accrued to many, with all that distinguishes every one's situation in society from that of others, should be traced back to the special kindness of the Lord. We should each of us remember, with good old Jacob, that "God hath fed us all our life long unto this day." Genesis xlviii. 15. He hath given us our temporal provision, whatever it hath been; and if we have lived thirty, forty, fifty, or more years, without experiencing the want of food or the other necessaries of life, we have abundant reason to say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The provision afforded us hath laid us under as deep obligations to gratitude, as if we had been fed by miracle, according to the kindness of the Lord to Israel: and in some respects we have had a decided advantage over them: for our supply has been more pleasant, in its nature and variety, than manna from the clouds, and water from the rock would have been. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness of it." "He openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness:" and he hath put it in our power to obtain a portion of his bounty.

Nor have our *dangers* been fewer than our *wants*. What multitudes are swept away by various sicknesses and disasters, in every stage of human life, even from the earliest infancy? How many have all their days embittered by perpetual disease? What frequent instances do we witness of such, as have been deprived of their limbs or senses; or even rendered most pitiable objects by incurable insanity? If then we have been favoured with a comfortable state of health; if violent maladies have not seized on us, or have been removed; if the use of our eyes, ears, senses, limbs, and understandings have been continued, or restored to us; whatever second causes have occurred, we should thankfully say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

Our lives and comforts are likewise exposed to perpetual dangers from wicked men. If then we have lain down in peace, one night after another, and risen in safety; if we or our dear friends have journeyed from time to time, during the course of our past lives, without having been injured, or even alarmed by robbers and murderers; or if, to shew us our danger, and remind us of our invisible protector, we have been alarmed, and yet preserved from material detriment, how ought we to bless and praise the Lord for his peculiar kindness to us? Every time we have gone from home, by land or sea; or have parted with our beloved relatives, thus called into distant parts; and on our return have met them in safey, without having experienced fatal disasters, or heart-rending distresses, should exite us to renew our grateful acknowledgments to the God of our lives.

Some of us can say, 'we were never, during all our past years, disturbed by the midnight alarm of fire in our habitations; our property, or part of our families were never thus tremendously taken from us.' Others may indeed have been thus alarmed and endangered, but were mercifully preserved; and extricated from the difficulties in which they were involved. And have we not, my friends, abundant cause for gratitude to our kind protector and deliverer?

Let us not on this occasion forget the special mercies we enjoy in this favoured land. The nation has indeed, within our days, been frequently en-

Digitized by Google

gaged in war, and great complaints have been made: but few of us know any thing experimentally of the horrors attending on actual warfare. We have not been shut up in besieged cities, or witnessed the dismay, carnage, and devastation of such a scene. Streets flowing with human blood, or strewed with mangled corpses; the groans of the wounded and dying; the ruins or smoke of houses made the graves of the inhabitants; with all the dire effects of places taken by assault, and given up to plunder and devastation, have not been rendered familiar to our senses. We have not beheld the fields ravaged by hostile armies, the labour of the husbandmen destroyed; towns and villages reduced to ashes; and the neighbourhood rendered almost a desert; except as the engines of destruction, the conflicting armies, the cries of the dying, or the more affecting lamentations of surviving parents, widows and orphans, give a sad variety to the dreary scene. How few comparatively of the human race have passed so large a portion of their lives, without sharing these sorrows, or having their hearts pained by these woful spectacles? Is there then no cause on this account to set up our Eben-ezer, and say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us?" If any doubt of it, a few months residence in a country that is made the seat of war would effectually teach them, provided they be peaceably disposed, to value a land of peace; and to be thankful, if henceforth they may know nothing of war, except from newspapers and taxes.—Many apprehensions have lately been entertained in our land on this account; but during another year we have been preserved. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

The same may likewise be observed concerning pestilences, earthquakes, hurricanes, famines, and other dreadful scourges of a guilty world. We have thus far been exempted from them; and our fears of these dire judgements, which desolate other cities and countries, with complicated miseries that baffle all description, should excite us to bless the Lord, who hath hitherto distinguished us by his special protection.

It would occupy too much time, and prove tedious to enter into further particulars of the deliverances, comforts and mercies, which the kind providence of God hath vouchsafed us. This specimen may suffice to aid the serious inquirer, in recollecting the peculiar favours he hath received during all his past life, which may prove one of the most useful studies in which he can engage.—It may, however, be proper to ask, whether there were not some one trial, which you have dreaded more than any other? Now, if you have either been preserved from this, or have, beyond expectation, been supported and carried through it; you can scarcely help considering this as a powerful call on you to say with gratitude, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

But it behoves us also to inquire, in what manner we have received the blessings of a kind providence, and what returns we have made for them? Alas, we have generally the utmost reason to confess our ungrateful forgetfulness of our Benefactor; our disposition to abuse or idolize his gifts; to undervalue them because not answerable to our exorbitant desires; to ascribe our safety and success to our own prudence and good conduct; or to spend our abundance in gratifying our carnal passions. This subject, therefore, if investigated with care, may probably convince us, that we have great cause to admire the Lord's goodness, in preserving us from *ourselves*, and the consequences of our own vices and follies. If we had been left without restraint, we might, either directly or by excesses, have long since proved our own murderers: we might have been hurried by violent passion or resentment, or in prosecution of some favourite project, to murder others, or have provoked them to murder us. We might in various ways have exposed ourselves to the sword of human vengeance: and it is indeed wonderful that the Lord hath borne with our rebellion and perverseness, and hath not cut us off in the midst of our sins. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." We are infinitely indebted to his patience

Digitized by Google

and long-suffering. He spared, protected, and provided for many of us, during a number of years, when we neither asked him to do it, nor thanked him for his kindness. While multitudes were perishing around us, and several of our companions in ungodliness were cut off; while we sinned on amidst repeated warnings, and narrow escapes; our offended God would neither destroy us, nor permit others to do it: nay, he prevented the fatal effects of our own madness and folly, and over-ruled many instances of it for our good! Thus he gave us space for repentance: his providential dealings with us had a tendency to excite our attention, and lead us to consider our ways: and every true penitent will perceive that they were actually designed to effect the most gracious purposes. We have been spared by the forbearance of our God, that we might be saved by his mercy!

2. God hath hitherto helped *believers* by his special grace.

Ages before we were brought into existence, He foresaw our wants and miseries, as the descendants of fallen Adam; "by whom sin entered into the world, and death by sin;" and in infinite mercy he had made all things ready for our salvation, in the person and redemption of his beloved Son. In due season he blessed the land, which was destined to be our residence, with the light of the gospel; and by a variety of wonderful interpositions he hath continued to it that light, while it hath been extinguished or greatly obscured in other lands. When we found our lot cast in a country thus distinguished, we had, perhaps for a long time, no disposition to attend to the word of salvation; but lived, carelessly or by choice, in Egyptian darkness on the very verge of Goshen. At length we were brought to hear the gospel, by events and circumstances in which we had no willing concurrence, or at least no intention of inquiring the way of life. Many have said, "I will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain." Or 'I will go, and take my fill of pleasure and diversion with my friends and companions:' but they have been disappointed of their aim; and in the very place of their purposed indulgence, gain, or preferment, have been induced to hear the word of God, and been made partakers of blessings inestimably precious. Thus the case of Saul, who went to seek the asses, but found them not, yet met with Samuel and was anointed king of Israel, has been far exceeded. Secular inducements have led others to remove to places favoured with the faithful preaching of God's word, without the least intention of regarding it; but after a while, curiosity or persuasion, or some other motive, induced them to give it a hearing, and thus they were made wise unto eternal life. Some, having resided a long time in a situation, where little regard was paid to religion; they were at length excited to resist, with all their influence, the introduction of another kind of preaching; and were much chagrined at not being able to carry the point. Yet afterwards attachment to a customary place of worship, or some motive of conveniency, brought them to hear the *new doctrine*, even the doctrine of Christ crucified! and at length a total change in their views, dispositions, and conduct, has filled them with admiring gratitude, and dictated most fervent praises to the Lord. Nay, in some instances, a man's gross misconduct has proved the occasion of bringing him to hear the word of life to the salvation of his soul. Thus Onesimus dishonestly leaving his master Philemon, fled to Rome, where the ministry of Paul was blessed to his conversion, and he became, as is generally supposed, an able pastor of the Christian church: and thus, I trust, several, whose vices were the cause of their seeking admission into this hospital, * have here been brought to repentance, faith in Christ, and newness of life; and will admire to all eternity the manifold wisdom and inexpressible mercy of God to them, in this gracious dispensation.

In these, and numberless other ways, the Lord is "found of them that sought him not, and made manifest to them that inquired not after him." Rom. x. 20. And the hints now offered may assist the serious Christian, in

* The Lock Hospital.

Digitized by Google

recollecting the peculiar means by which the Lord "first opened his eyes, and turned him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."

We should however observe, that numbers have been favoured with the same means, who never obtained the same blessing. It occurs therefore to inquire, "Who made thee to differ from another?" Some of us are conscious, that when we first heard or read the doctrine of Christ, which now is "all our salvation, and all our desire," we treated it not merely with indifference, but with decided contempt and aversion. Nay, we opposed and reasoned against it with all our might, calumniating or ridiculing those who held it. We can remember how strenuously we endeavoured to stifle our convictions, and to answer the arguments which almost prevailed over our prejudices: how we tried to quiet our minds, either by reflecting on our supposed virtue; by growing more punctual in a task of religion; or by listening to our own self-complacency and the flattery of our friends, in respect of the imagined superiority of our talents. When baffled on these grounds, we can recollect how we attempted to elude the conviction, by listening to disadvantageous reports concerning those reputedly *enthusiastical* teachers, who maintained the humiliating doctrines of grace; and by charging their principles, on some occasions, with tending to licentiousness; on others, by blaming them as too precise and rigorous in their requirements and example. Nay, perhaps some present, when all these methods failed, have tried to forget the whole in the hurry of business, a succession of company and dissipation, an excess of riot, or even a close application to study. Indeed it would not be wonderful, if some individuals should be conscious, that after all other attempts to quiet their consciences, they have at last had recourse to an antinomian or enthusiastical abuse of the gospel, as the last and most effectual expedient for keeping upon good terms with themselves, without parting with their worldly idols.

Not one of these ways of eluding conviction can be mentioned, which hath not been tried by one or another; not one of these snares, in which some of us have not been successively entangled; yet in every one of them numbers are finally given up to "a strong delusion to believe a lie; that they might all be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. How is it then, my brethren, that any of us have been "recovered out of the snare of the devil, who had taken us captive at his will?" We can in no other way account for it, than by saying that God mercifully "gave us repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. "God who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Eph. ii. 3—8. "The giver of every good and perfect gift," not only bestowed the Saviour, and the free pardon and salvation of all that truly believe in him; but he gave us repentance and faith likewise, and "made us willing in the day of his power:" and thus he has a claim upon us for the highest possible gratitude and admiring praise.

Even since the time when we first were "warned to flee from the wrath to come," and to "lay hold for refuge on the hope set before us;" how numerous have been our conflicts, difficulties, and dangers? Many, who appeared to the most competent judges far more promising than we were, "in time of temptation have fallen away," or "they have been choked with cares, and riches, and the lusts of other things, and have brought no fruit to perfection." Some have evidently returned to "their wallowing in the mire, and their last state is worse than the first." Others have been "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Thus they have proved "unstable in all their ways," have become the zealous propagators of some pestilential heresy, or have "turned aside to vain jangling." Many have grown lukewarm in the grand essentials of religion, and proportionably fierce and contentious in supporting certain *dogmas*, by which some parts of the truth

Digitized by Google

are pushed to anti-scriptural extremes. In short, in a course of years, if we have accurately observed the affairs of the church, we have witnessed and lamented many astonishing changes, suited to excite our gratitude to the Lord, who "hath hitherto helped us," and guided us at a distance from those rocks, quick-sands, and whirlpools, which have proved fatal to numbers.

Our own experience likewise may help us to form a proper judgment of the divine goodness, in thus far protecting and upholding us. If we have for any length of time, "fought the good fight of faith," we must have a consciousness, that in many instances we were "cast down but not destroyed." Our enemy hath been sometimes ready to rejoice over us as actually vanquished. Outward circumstances gave force to our innate depravity, and our customary or easily besetting sins; the tempter was permitted "to sift us as wheat;" we had the sentence of death in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead. Perhaps temptation prevailed against us; and a guilty conscience united with an unbelieving despondency to bring us into deep waters. The insults of enemies, or the censures of friends, perhaps concurred with divine rebukes and corrections, to dismay our hearts. Yet amidst all, we determined, even from the belly of hell, to look unto the Lord, and to cry unto him, "O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul!" "We waited on the Lord, and he heard our prayer; he brought us out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay; he set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings; and he hath put a new song into our mouth, even thanksgiving to our God." Psalm xl. 1—3. cxvi. 1—8. cxxx. Thus "he delivered us from so great a death, and in him we trust that he will yet deliver us." 2 Cor. i. 9, 10. Even if our conflicts have not been so severe, if we have not been thus baffled and shamed, we know to whom we owe our preservation; and we have had so many humiliating proofs of our own perverseness, weakness, negligences, and relapses into idolatrous attachments and various evils, that we cannot but look upon our escapes as marvellous, and sometimes stand amased, that we have not been left to renounce or disgrace the gospel. Every year, month, week, or even day, during which we have been preserved, and every declension from which we have been recovered, is an addition to obligations already great beyond all computation.

Indeed a general view of our situation in this evil world must increase our conviction, that the Lord alone hath kept us, or can keep us from evil. The countless dangers of our path; the course of the world, with its maxims, fashions, examples and allurements; the influence of fear, hope, affection, and even gratitude to men, upon our religious conduct; our natural strong desire of honour, friendship, ease, wealth or indulgence; our aversion to censure, reproach, contempt, and poverty; and the various ways, in which these propensities may be addressed to turn us aside from the direct path, suggest many interesting reflections to the serious mind. The infectious examples even of some zealous preachers and professors of evangelical truth, and the worldly spirit sanctioned by them; with the snares, which are laid in all our employments, connections, and comforts; in solitude and company, and even in religious duties; the number, power, subtlety, and unwearied malice of our enemies, the powers of darkness; the fallibility of our judgment, the scantiness of our knowledge, the weakness of our purposes, and the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our hearts; all remind us, how greatly we are indebted to the Lord, who hath hitherto helped us. It is indeed a marvellous mercy, if we can say, "Having obtained help of God, we continue to this day;" and have neither made a shipwreck of our faith, nor brought a scandal upon the gospel; but still desire with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.

Much more might profitably be added did time permit, concerning the continued kindness we have received; in the friends raised up for us; and the way in which our heavenly Father hath made up our losses, extricated us out of difficulties, moderated our temptations, renewed our comforts, re-

Digitized by Google

vived our hopes and earnestness, prolonged our days, and afforded us means of grace and opportunities of usefulness. These, and many more subjects may be thought of, in our private meditations, while we endeavour to enter on another year, with thankfully acknowledging that "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us."

II. Then we inquire what is meant by "Setting up an Eben-ezer," according to the common, and not improper use of the expression.

The nature of the case, and the example before us concur in proving, that it implies a disposition to give the Lord the glory of all the blessings we have received. We do not ascribe the favourable difference between *our* situations, prospects, or character, and those of other men, to *our own* wisdom, management, or exertions; but to that God, "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." We pretend not to have merited the divine protection, guidance, and blessings; but feel that all was given us as creatures, without our deserving any thing: and that every good thing bestowed on us as sinners, is contrary to our deserts. We ascribe none of our deliverances or successes to chance, necessity, or second causes; but trace them all to the great First Cause; to him "who doeth all things after the counsel of his own will." Samuel gave not the honour of Israel's preservation to any of the servants of God, who had been raised up from the days of Moses, nor did he take it to himself; but ascribed it to the Lord alone. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planted any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. To set up an Eben-ezer therefore implies a disposition to say, in praise as well as in prayer, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Psalm cxv. 1. And to ascribe all our blessings, to the everlasting love of the Father, the atonement and mediation of the Son, and to the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

It implies also an open acknowledgment of our obligations to the Lord, a confession of our own unworthiness; and an endeavour by all proper means, to perpetuate the memory of the Lord's great goodness towards us, in our families, and among all with whom we are connected. An open profession of the truth, with a consistent example and conversation; attendance on the ordinances of God, diligence in the instruction of children and domestics, and the improvement of our several talents to promote true religion, constitute such an avowal of our obligations to the Lord. These things tend to diffuse the knowledge of his abundant kindness, and to preserve the remembrance of it, for the encouragement of our brethren, and inducement to sinners to seek the participation of our privileges.

We must not, however, be satisfied with thankful acknowledgments of the past; but when we set up an Eben-ezer, and say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us;" we should renew our dedication of ourselves to him in respect of the future. "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice. And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, that thou shouldst keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken." Deut. xxvi. Having thus far experienced the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, the pleasantness of his ways, and the misery of departing from them; we thank him for the past, and express our purpose and desire of walking with him all the residue of our lives. Our review of the way which we have come invigorates these determinations, increases our simplicity of dependence on his continued grace, and teaches us the necessity of greater vigilance and cir-

Digitized by Google

cumspection; that "whether we eat, or whether we drink, or whatever we do, we may do all to the glory of God."

In these respects the Lord's Supper is a stated method of setting up an Eben-ezer. When, with serious recollection and self-examination; with renewed exercises of repentance, faith and love; with humble confessions, fervent prayers, and thankful praises, we commemorate the sufferings and death of our Redeemer: we then join ourselves to the Lord and his chosen people, we avouch him to be our God; we thank him for the past, and commit ourselves to his keeping for the future; and we declare our determined purpose, by his grace, to walk in his holy ways during the remainder of our lives. It seems therefore peculiarly proper to begin a new year, with this solemn act of adoring praise, this renewed dedication of ourselves to the service of our God and Saviour.

This review should likewise excite us to be "followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Our conduct towards others ought to be a constant imitation of the long-suffering compassion, readiness to forgive and relieve, and persevering goodness of the Lord towards us; that "we may never be weary of well-doing," or "be overcome of evil;" but that we may "overcome evil with good."

Finally, the recollection and thankful acknowledgment that "hitherto hath the Lord helped us," should encourage our hearts to run with patience the remainder of "the race set before us." The Lord, that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine." 1 Sam. xvii. 37. He that hath preserved and assisted us in so many dangers and difficulties already, will "never leave us nor forsake us." "He fainteth not, neither is weary." His understanding is infinite, his resources inexhaustible, his faithfulness unfailing, and his mercy everlasting. We should therefore comfort one another with these considerations, learn "to cast all our care on Him who careth for us," and pour out our hearts before him; we should remember that "our Father knoweth what things we have need of," and that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "Clouds and darkness are about him," and gloomy prospects may meet our view; but the perfections and covenant engagements of the Lord are unchangeable; and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "He will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it;" yea "The Lord shall deliver us from every evil work, and will preserve us to his heavenly kingdom. To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Cor. x. 13. 2 Tim. iv. 18.

These are some of the encouragements and instructions which real Christians may receive from the subject before us. But how stand matters with our souls? Hitherto the Lord hath prolonged all our lives, and we now enter on another year; while many of our acquaintance or relatives are gone to their long home. We yet remain in the land of faith, of hope, of mercy and of prayer; while numbers have been removed to the regions of darkness and despair, and some to the realms of endless day.—But the time is short.—The end of all things is at hand.—A little moment, as it were, will terminate our season of probation and preparation for eternity; the continuance of our earthly comforts or trials, and our opportunities of doing good to men, and glorifying God in this world of sin and misery.

Have none of you then entered on this new year, destitute of vital godliness, strangers to repentance and works meet for repentance, and unacquainted with a life of faith in the Son of God, and communion with the Father through him? Are none of you still loitering and procrastinating, loath to part with worldly idols, and averse to diligent piety? Or are you not trying to persuade yourselves, that so much strictness is unnecessary, that by attention to decent forms and moral duties, or an assent to certain doctrines, you may reconcile religion with your worldly spirit and pursuits, and thus

Digitized by Google

serve God and mammon?—You have indeed been spared to enter on anot year, and have great cause, though little heart for thankfulness: but w assurance have you that you shall live to the close of it? Several who join with us last year in the service of the day, are now entered on an eternal state; and probably many of us shall join them before this year shall terminate. And how terrible will this be to those, who by a perverse abuse of the Lord's abundant mercies, have increased their own condemnation? Still the Holy Ghost says, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." And we entreat you, join your prayer for yourselves to our supplications in your behalf, that in the present year you may be "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Perhaps some are blessing God, that this has been their happy case, during the preceding year; and are now saying within themselves, 'Had I died before the year 1795, I should have perished in my sins, without Christ and without hope. But the Lord who spared me when others were cut off, and rescued me from numberless dangers, seen and unseen, when I habitually trampled on his commandments, and neglected his salvation, hath at length in boundless mercy, "granted me repentance," enabled me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and taught me by his grace to walk in newness of life.' "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy."—How memorable with you, my brethren, even to eternal ages, will be this "acceptable year of the Lord," which to many hath doubtless been "the day of vengeance of our God." O endeavour to "shew forth his praises, not only with your lips, but in your lives, by giving up yourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all your days." Then many will glorify God on your behalf, and you will be in some degree instrumental in bringing others to seek the same blessings. Abide in Christ; keep close to the means of grace; watch against temptation; be not high-minded, but fear, for your enemies are many, and your hearts are deceitful; yet "be sober and hope unto the end." "For greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." Wait on the Lord continually, that he may renew your strength: and take heed, lest an increase of knowledge and maturity of judgment should be attended by an abatement in the fervour of your affections. Be not contented with the low attainments of professors in this lukewarm age; but follow those who have most closely followed Christ. And now approach with us to his table, to avow your acceptance of his salvation, and surrender of yourselves to his service; that as "bought with a price, you may glorify God with your bodies and spirits which are his."

Some perhaps to this very day, may stand in doubt to what class or company they belong. May the Lord enable such persons to begin this new year with "giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure!" Inquire, my friends, with impartial strictness, into the reasons of your uncertainty and darkness: cast away every idol, break off every entangling pursuit or engagement; return from your backslidings, and seek the Lord with all your hearts: that should this year terminate your lives, your setting sun may break forth with cheering beams, and gild the dark valley through which you must pass: or should you be spared—that your walk may be henceforth more close with God, more honourable and comfortable, and more edifying and encouraging to those around you.

My Christian brethren! let us enter on this new year, by seriously reviewing the one that we have finished; that we may be humbled for the sins into which we have been betrayed, and rendered more simply dependent and watchful: and that we may be more thankful for the special mercies, personal, social, and public, with which we have been favoured. Let us earnestly beg a blessing from God on every attempt we have made to sow the

Digitized by Google

seed of truth, to speak a word in season, and to recommend the gospel; beseeching him also to prevent the bad effect of our mistakes and inconsistencies. We should likewise remember that time is short: that we may learn patience in tribulation, joyfulness in hope, indifference about things present, and diligence in our proper work. "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." Eccles. ix. 10. "Let your loins then be girded, and your lamps burning;" and be habitually expecting the coming of the Lord. Endeavour to recollect what designs of usefulness you had formed, and intended to have executed during the last year, or in any former period; and set about them without delay: persevere in every good work and Christian course on which you have entered; and aim to press forward, to grow in grace, and abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness. Then should this be your last year, as it possibly may, and as some have probable reason to expect, death will be your gain: and while the survivors among us may meet together at the return of this season to set up another Eben-ezer to our merciful God; others will have joined the company before the throne, and be triumphantly rejoicing and blessing the Lord, that he hath helped them quite through, made them more than conquerors, and placed them for ever out of the reach of dangers and enemies.—May we all, as in succession called out of this world, thus join the heavenly worshippers; till at length,

When all the chosen race
Shall meet before the throne,
To bless the conduct of his grace,
And make his wonders known;

We may be found of that happy number, and meet once more to set up an Eben-ezer in the world above, and to join in eternal adorations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the one God of our salvation, to whom be praise and glory for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL AFFLICTIONS.

ISAIAH, IX. 13.

For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them · neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

"THE Lord sent a word unto Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel:" Jehovah had denounced judgments on the nation descended from the patriarchs; which had begun to be accomplished on the kingdom of Israel, by the kings of Syria and Assyria: yet the people disregarded these tokens of the divine displeasure. "And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say, in the pride and stoutness of heart; The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together. The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, and they shall devour Israel with

* Preached on the ninth of March, 1796, being a day of fasting and humiliation.

Digitized by Google

open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." After all the calamities which came on Israel by these numerous enemies, still more complicated and tremendous miseries awaited the nation, which would be inflicted by the subsequent kings of Assyria, and terminate in their final ruin and dispersion. "For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them; neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts." The text, thus opened, suggests the following topics suited to the present emergency.

I. When affliction is experienced, we should remember that the Lord smiteth us.

II. It is our duty and wisdom in this case to turn unto the Lord.

III. As Israel of old did not, so Great Britain at present doth not, properly attend to this duty.

IV. This circumstance may well create most serious alarm concerning the event of our present calamities.

V. The admonitions and instructions which may be deduced from these considerations.

I. We observe, that when affliction is experienced, we should remember that the Lord smiteth us.

A vain philosophy is at present employed, to resolve all events into second causes, and impute them to men or measures: as if that God, who "doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth," in fact did nothing, but left the universe to the established laws of nature, or the uncontrolled devices and machinations of his creatures!—I would not be supposed, my brethren, to speak against a true philosophy, the investigation of God's works, and a sober inquiry into the ordinary rules by which he governs the world: for this conduces to an intelligent perception of his operations, and an admiring sense of his wisdom, power, justice, and goodness. But sceptical reasonings about second causes, and an undue attention to instruments, exceedingly tend to make men overlook the First Cause, that great Agent "who worketh all in all."

In this respect as well as others, we should learn "to speak according to the oracles of God:" for in Scripture his hand is acknowledged on every occasion. "By Naaman the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria." "I inform you," says the apostle, "of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;" that is their liberality which was the effect of divine grace. "Thanks be to God who put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus." 2 Kings, v. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 1—3, 16, 17. The exercise of faith leads us to view the Lord in every object and event; to taste his love in our most common mercies, and to submit to his correction by whatever means it is brought upon us.

The arrogance, blasphemy, rapacity, and ambition of Sennacherib can scarcely be exceeded: yet observe what the Lord says of him; "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down as the mire of the streets: howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so." Isaiah, x. 5—7. Hezekiah and his principal assistants in reforming Judah were very sincere and zealous: 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21. but many of the princes, priests, and people had been mere dissemblers in their apparent concurrence. The Lord therefore determined to employ Sennacherib, to execute judgement on them for their hypocrisy; and when he had fulfilled that commission, he meant to take still more signal vengeance on him. It is vain then for us to expect success against our enemies, merely because they are infidels or atheists, if we be only nominal Christians; for the Lord commonly employs such men to correct or punish his hypocritical worshippers.—Executioners, in general, are not the most respectable cha-

Digitized by Google

racters; and a malefactor would act absurdly who should hope to escape the sentence denounced against him, because he supposed the person appointed to inflict it, more criminal than himself. For the man might be spared till he had done his work, before he was called to account for his crimes.

The Lord smote Egypt with desolating plagues; and flies, lice, locusts, and frogs were his instruments, in pouring contempt, as well as vengeance, on haughty Pharaoh. But in smiting the Canaanites, he gave Joshua and Israel a charge against them. These nations deserved their doom; and an express commission, sealed by undeniable miracles, fully warranted all that was done against them. But in general, the instruments of punishment are unrighteous, though the Lord be righteous in the judgements they inflict. When the Israelites provoked him, the Philistines, Midianites, Syrians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Romans, were successively employed in smiting them: the rod of correction, or sword of vengeance was changed, but the hand that used it was the same. Nay, when domestic usurpers, tyrants, or persecutors, like Ahab, Athaliah, or Manasseh, brought calamities upon them, the Lord made use of them as his instruments. "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it." Amos iii. 6. The *evil of sin* is wholly from the creature, but the evil of suffering from the Lord, who thus punishes the transgressions of his offending subjects. Whether afflictions come immediately from the hand of God, as sickness, famine, pestilences, and earthquakes, or by the intervention of men, the case in this respect is not altered. The Chaldeans and Sabeans unjustly seized on Job's property, and slew his servants; fire from heaven consumed his flocks; and the wind threw down the house upon his children; yet he made no distinction, but said in general, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Whether, therefore, our present public distresses and dangers be the natural consequences of providential dispensations; or whether the misconduct of men have been, and is in any degree the cause of them, we must acknowledge that it is the Lord who smiteth us.—A scarcity and dearness of provisions, decay of trade, and various hardships, are generally complained of; and many imagine that they are occasioned by the mistakes, or crimes of this or the other description of men. Now, in a political sense, it is a matter of great importance to investigate and develope this point, and to use proper methods of counteracting every attempt of such a nature: but as a religious concern, it is not in the smallest degree material; for, on every supposition, the hand of God should be acknowledged. I am not competent to determine what grounds there are for such suspicions or censures; nor is this the place for so much as giving an opinion on the subject: but as a minister of religion, I must declare, that, till proper methods of discovering and removing the distresses we feel, be used and prospered, the righteous Lord continues to smite us, whether unjust men be his instruments or not.

"The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name." The power and perfections of God are perceived by men of wisdom in all public calamities. "Hear ye then the Rod, and who hath appointed it?" Micah vi. 9. The Rod calls us to repentance: but unless we recollect who it is that hath appointed it, we shall not hear and obey the voice of the Rod, however we may smart and groan under its repeated strokes. I insist the more fully on this point, because Satan successively contrives to confuse the minds even of serious persons about it. They are told, and they believe, that this or the other description of men, by their folly or knavery, occasion the public distresses: and others dispute with them and vindicate men and measures. But in the mean while, "the Lord's hand is lifted up, and they will not see;" he smites, and they refuse to humble themselves before him: being employed in disputing about the rod and the sword.

But if some men be infatuated in their counsels, or others intoxicated by extravagant projects; if one set of men will be rich at any rate; another try to abuse power in tyranny and oppression; or a third would throw a nation into confusion, civil war, or anarchy, to gratify their own ambition or

Digitized by Google

rapacity; the Lord permits them to practice and prosper, in order by them to scourge an hypocritical or ungodly people. If David were left in vainglory to number Israel, and this made way for the desolations of a pestilence: the nation had first provoked the Lord by their sins to leave the king to that pernicious project. 2 Samuel xxiv. 1. He must therefore be acknowledged in all the miseries thus occasioned: but this neither excuses the sins of those, who indulge their corrupt passions to the ruin of their neighbours; nor renders it improper to employ every equitable and prudent method of redressing public grievances.

When we recognize the hand of the Lord in our sufferings, we must not only view his power, but submit likewise to his justice. "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled: thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Psalm xc. 7, 8. We should not only consider sin, but *our own* sins, as the cause of our afflictions. It is a common, but a most absurd mistake, to profess humiliation before God for national crimes as the cause of public judgements; and yet to think only of the sins committed by other men! But "are there not with us sins against the Lord our God?" "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search, and try our ways and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned." Lam. iii. 39—42. Did we thus search and try our ways, and compare our past and present conduct with the law of God; we should soon be convinced of our personal criminality, and should both join in the service of the day, and do it heartily and earnestly. No suffering which any man endures as sharing in national calamities, is more severe than his sins deserve: the criminality therefore of others should not prevent our acknowledging the righteousness of God, in his most afflictive dispensations.

His *mercy* indeed should also be noticed in our chastisements. It is very merciful in him to correct us for our sins, and not to leave us to be hardened by prosperity. To "fare sumptuously every day," without warning or rebuke; and then to be cut off at once, and to lift up the eyes in hell amidst hopeless torments, is the most dreadful case imaginable. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth:" and all our present sufferings are suited to induce reflections and teach repentance.

We should also be thankful that the Lord chastens us so gently; for "it is of his mercies we are not consumed." Instead of our present light afflictions, we might justly be left to all the horrors of famine, during which tender mothers have eaten their children; our fields and cities might have been ravaged by fierce invaders; all our comforts and hopeful prospects might have been removed, and every conceivable distress accumulated. We ought therefore to own the mercy of God in exempting us from the most excruciating anguish that can rend the human heart. Nay, we should remember the words of the Psalmist, "I know O Lord that thy judgements are right, and thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Psalm cxix. 75. Corrections are needful, and are promised as blessings: when we pray for humility, a spiritual mind, increase of faith, and other holy dispositions, we in effect pray for chastisement; and we should therefore acknowledge the Lord's faithfulness to his promises, and his wisdom and love in answering our prayers, in a way we did not expect, but which was best suited to promote our most important advantages.

II. Then we proceed to show, that it is our duty and wisdom under affliction to turn to the Lord, and to seek his favour.

If men smite us we may resist or retaliate; we may flee or attempt to hide ourselves; but we cannot resist omnipotence, or conceal ourselves from him who is omniscient and omnipotent. Neither can we stand before him in judgment, or justify our conduct in his sight: so that we have no possible way of escaping his righteous vengeance, except by fleeing for refuge to lay

Digitized by Google

hold on his mercy.—Whether the Lord contend with an individual or a nation; he will overcome; and he will continue smiting till we turn unto him. Obstinate impenitence is therefore a species of insanity: it is a perverseness which prolongs misery, and provokes the Lord to lay aside his chastening rod, and take his avenging sword. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins." Psalm xxxii. 3—5. The Lord of Hosts or armies, who is able to save and destroy, calls upon us by every suffering or calamity, to turn unto him and seek reconciliation before it be too late; that we may escape his intolerable wrath, and be secure and comfortable under his omnipotent protection. He still "waiteth to be gracious:" he may be found upon the mercy-seat through Jesus Christ by the cry of penitent faith; and he never casts out those who humbly call upon him. Let us hear his words by the prophet: "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue.—I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early. Come and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn and he will heal us. He hath smitten and he will bind us up." Hosea v. 14, 15. vi. 1. The Lord declares the plan on which he determines to proceed with his offending people; and the prophet grounds the suitable exhortation and encouragement upon it. Thus he says likewise in another place, "O Israel return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words and turn unto the Lord; say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea xiv. 1—4.

But another prophet more fully inculcates the duty of a nation under great distress. "Therefore now also saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.—Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and let them say, spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; wherefore should they say among the people, where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people." Joel ii. 12—18. You see, my brethren, that the ordinances of this day are most perfectly Scriptural, and that all orders of men are in duty bound to attend on them: nor will the misconduct of any persons whatever exculpate those who neglect them. Assuredly the Lord will not condemn us, however men may censure us, for complying exactly with the proclamation of our sovereign, provided our services be not hypocritical.

The passage that hath been read demands our most particular attention; for it teaches us in what manner a people should "turn to him that smiteth them." We must return to him with all our heart, with unfeigned submission to his righteousness, and repentance of our sins; praying earnestly, "Turn thou us, and so shall we be turned: create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us." This should be accompanied with fasting, and other tokens of humiliation. Abstinence from every animal indulgence, and from food, as far as health and circumstances will admit, is a Scriptural

Digitized by Google

acknowledgement, that we have forfeited our most common mercies; and that sin hath embittered them to us. It implies that our minds are too much occupied with matters of the highest importance, to attend on such low concerns; that we wish to avoid all interruption of our sacred duties; that we mean to chasten ourselves with fasting, as a token of our submission to the Lord's correcting hand; and that we would use all means of crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts.

If we be indeed suitably affected with the consideration of our own sins, and the crimes and miseries of our countrymen; we shall turn unto the Lord with godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of. Outward expressions, however emphatical, will not suffice; we shall rend our hearts in deep contrition and self-abasement, perceiving that we have no hope but in the Lord's unmerited mercy, which we shall supplicate with fervency and importunity. And when princes, senators, magistrates, ministers of religion, and the people in general, laying aside all other employments, unite in thus humbly seeking the Lord of Hosts, a crisis may be expected in public affairs. "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people."

In this manner the king of Nineveh and his nobles, with all the inhabitants of that immense city, sought the Lord when he threatened to smite them; encouraged merely by a peradventure, "who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?" Jonah iii. Surely that heathen city will rise up in judgement with this Christian land and condemn it; for it repented at the preaching of Jonah; and doubtless our religious advantages are inconceivably greater; yet alas, how little does the observance of a fast in London resemble that proclaimed at Nineveh!

The words of the apostle likewise demand our serious consideration. "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren." James iv. 7—11. Instead of reviling or condemning other men, every individual should be employed in confessing and lamenting his own sin, in humbly deprecating the Lord's indignation, and using every means of overcoming evil habits and forsaking sinful courses.

This accords also with the exhortation of the prophet. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him." Isaiah lv. 6, 7. But without true repentance and works meet for repentance, no appearances of strictness, humiliation, or grief, will constitute such a fast as the Lord hath chosen. "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?—Behold in the day of your fast ye find pleasure and exact all your labours. Behold ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness." Isaiah lviii.

The substantial and permanent effects of repentance, and faith in God's mercy, must be manifested in our future lives if we would be thought sincerely to have turned to the Lord and sought him in our distresses. Nor can any nation be considered as having duly regarded the rod and the word of God, unless a general reformation and revival of religion take place; or at least till numbers, in the different orders of the community, use the most decided endeavours to restrain and discountenance vice and impiety, to reform inveterate abuses, which have been connived at and sanctioned by a corrupt policy, and to encourage and promote genuine piety and purity of manners.

III. This leads me to observe, that as the people of Israel did not, neither

Digitized by Google

do the inhabitants of Great Britain turn to the Lord that smiteth; an observation which I make with reluctance and unfeigned sorrow.

Our peculiar mercies have been numerous and invaluable, for a long course of years: but our prosperity seemed at its height, just before the American war, when our iniquities provoked the Lord to smite us. During the calamities attending on that unhappy contest, we were called upon to observe one season of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, after another. On these occasions, while numbers employed themselves in political discussions and party disputes, there were also many ministers from the pulpit, and some from the press, who endeavoured to observe the Lord's command to the prophet, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah lviii. 1. They alleged, that the nation had been intoxicated with prosperity; was become arrogant and insolent; had forgotten the Lord, ascribing their success to their own wisdom and prowess, and depending on themselves for its continuance. They shewed that negligence and lukewarmness in religion had introduced various antiscriptural deviations from the gospel, which, gaining ground among the superior orders, and even the professed ministers of Christ, had opened the door to scepticism and infidelity, which were making rapid progress in the nation. They lamented, that impiety, contempt of God's word, profanation of his holy day in a variety of ways, perjuries multiplied and connived at beyond all former examples; venality among all orders of the community; and shameless prevarication in solemn subscriptions, sacred engagements, and sacramental tests, were notoriously common. They affirmed that systems of fraud, oppression, and cruelty, especially in foreign parts; unprecedented luxury and dissipation among the higher orders in society, and licentiousness among their inferiors, even beyond the ordinary measures found in pagan or papal countries, together with many other crying iniquities, had provoked the Lord to contend with us. This representation was accompanied with earnest calls to repentance, and exhortations to every one to use his influence in attempting reformation and promoting the cause of truth, piety, justice, and mercy, in his own sphere, and according to the duties of his station. Yet those warnings and admonitions, repeated from year to year, produced no sensible effects: the same evils continued and increased; and the services of the fast-day seemed generally and willingly forgotten, as soon as they were finished. We were however at length brought into a very alarming situation: yet the Lord, in answer to the prayers of the pious remnant in the land, remembered us in mercy: the storm was rebuked, and a flattering calm succeeded.

But alas, instead of making suitable returns for such mercies, every one of those evils, which had been Scripturally proved to be the causes of the Lord's controversy, were continued still to contaminate the land; and all the protests and warnings of ministers and Christians were ridiculed as visionary, enthusiastical, and superstitious. The event, as men supposed, contradicted their forebodings, and increasing prosperity succeeded to the alarm. Yet, while the nation was thus saying "peace and safety," a dark cloud began again to threaten a most tremendous storm. The violent and extraordinary changes which took place on the continent, and the spirit manifested by numbers at home, combined to excite most serious apprehensions. After a time, this deplorable and eventful war broke out; and though our distresses have not hitherto been worthy to be compared with those calamities which many dreaded, yet they have certainly been very great, and none can say in what manner they will terminate.

Immediately, the same means of averting the divine indignation was resorted to: days of fasting and prayer have repeatedly been observed; and similar warnings and exhortations have been urged from the pulpit and the press. This is now the fourth time we have complied with the royal proclamation: and many zealous efforts have been made to awaken men to a sense both of our situation and our duty. But what effects have been wit-

Digitized by Google

nessed? Who almost can be found, that manifests a more humble, spiritual, zealous, and conscientious disposition, in consequence of these ordinances? The few instances of this kind, which doubtless have occured, are scarcely visible in the great mass of those, who outwardly observe the day, and then think no more about it. Many who are supposed to concur in its appointment, openly refuse to attend on any of its duties; and this gives others an occasion of representing the observance as a political device, and of turning the whole into profane ridicule!

Some fast, or *pretend* to "fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness:" and while they revile, others pay court to, their superiors: and thus they make a day of fasting and prayer an opportunity of seeking favour, either from the populace or from the magistrate! In short, the very observance of so important and solemn an occasion, as it is too generally conducted, may be considered as an accession to our national sins: and the spirit discovered by numbers, even of those who in other respects seem to be religious, creates an alarm, lest the proper remedy for our maladies should hasten the death of the unfeebled patient.

In the mean time the most daring and blasphemous infidelity, scarcely distinguishable from atheism, is zealously propagated, and greedily imbibed, by a deluded populace and the rising generation: while almost every effort to counteract its progress is marked with feebleness; nay, too often with treachery, the defenders of the outworks betraying the citadel into the hands of the besiegers. Impiety, profanation of the sabbath, perjury, venality, dissipation, licentiousness, are rapidly increasing. An unruly spirit disdaining subordination threatens to level all distinctions in society; while alas! few of those, who are thus distinguished, take proper and decided methods of counteracting, its inroads, or softening the odium, envy, and contempt, from which it springs. The various species of vice and profaneness, heretofore protested against, are permitted to exist and gather strength; while little is so much as attempted in removing occasions and encouragements to them. Yea, that horrid monster, *the slave trade*, is still sanctioned by the British legislature, and conducted by merchants professing to be the disciples of Him, who said "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." These are notorious facts, and demonstrate that notwithstanding all appearances, "The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts." And though the present scarcity seems to have given a temporary check to the excessive luxury that prevailed, and to have called forth a very commendable spirit of humanity to the indigent; yet other symptoms prove this to be merely a partial and occasional effort: and we may still say, that with comparatively a very few exceptions, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." So that "except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been like Sodom and Gomorrah."

IV. Then we observe, that this circumstance may justly excite serious alarms, concerning the event of our present difficulties.

If we were, as a nation, generally united in turning to the Lord, and strenuously seeking a revival of genuine Christianity; neither the number, courage or violence of our foes, the wavering or dubious conduct of our allies, the weight of taxes and public incumbrances, nor even the scarcity of provisions could give alarm in respect of the future, to a mind accustomed to judge according to the Scripture. But an opposite conduct, in a nation favoured like Britain with every advantage for religious improvement, must excite serious apprehensions for the consequences. No doubt we stand in the same relation to the Lord, that Israel did of old, and must expect to be dealt with according to the same measure. Nations, as well as individuals, which have not known the will of God, may be beaten for their crimes with few stripes: but we, who have had the most abundant opportunities of learning his truths and precepts, yet have pertinaciously continued in disobedience, must expect

Digitized by Google

to be beaten more severely. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." Amos iii. 2.

Let us attend to the words of the prophet, "In that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth, and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die." Sennacherib's invasion was a divine call to fasting, mourning, repentance, and prayer: but the people united excessive sensual indulgence, with infidel principles and daring impiety. "And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts; surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die." Isaiah xxii. 12—14. Alas, does not the spirit and conduct of men in general throughout our land so exactly accord to this description, that a serious mind cannot but dread the denunciation of a like sentence against us? Thus Amos also warned the Jews and Israelites in his time. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.—Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to draw near. That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches; that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall: that chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint them with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore shall they go captive with the first that go captive; and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed. The Lord God hath sworn by himself, I abhor the excellency of Jacob and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein." Amos vi. 1—8. And in another place—"I have given you cleanness of teeth in your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have withholden the rain,—yet have ye not returned unto me.—I have smitten you with blasting and mildew;— I have sent pestilence upon you. I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Amos iv. 6—13. If the people would not return to the Lord, when he corrected them as a Father, let them prepare to meet him as an avenging Judge.

In this case the form of godliness or profession of Christianity, will avail nothing. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord, I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts: and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity even your solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: when ye make many prayers I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, &c." Isaiah i. "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching to God.—Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; and that ye break every yoke?" Isaiah lviii. 2—6. "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father. Now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Matt. iii. 7—12.

Digitized by Google

These Scriptures, to which many more might properly be added, abundantly prove that no external humiliation, or public honour put upon God and religion, can procure more than a respite to a guilty nation, unless repentance and works meet for repentance be connected with them. Such an outward shew of contrition Ahab exhibited, and a reprieve was granted him: but the destruction of him and his family was not averted.

We are not authorized to say at what time, or in what manner, the Lord may see good to be avenged on such a nation as this. He deals with collective bodies and with individuals in some respects according to the same rules. Young persons having heard the wrath of God denounced against sin, frequently venture upon flagrant vices with considerable apprehensions: but escaping with impunity, they grow bolder in wickedness, and are apt to conclude the threatenings of Scripture to be mere empty words. Thus "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccl. viii. 11. But "he that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. xxix. 1. Some are cut off in youth, others are spared, and persist in wickedness till they are grown old: but in general ungodly men are most secure when vengeance is at hand." 1 Thess. v. 1, 2.

In like manner, guilty nations being often warned that their iniquities will bring down the judgements of God upon them, and finding respite, become hardened in sin; the remonstrances and reproofs of the Lord's servants are disregarded, or only expose them to reproach, scorn, and ill-usage; the measure of their wickedness fills up rapidly, but without being observed; and when infidel and impious presumption are at the height, vengeance overtakes them as suddenly as if they had never been forewarned. Thus it was with Israel and Judah in the Assyrian and Chaldean captivities; and especially this was the case of the Jews, at the time when Jerusalem, the temple, and the whole country was finally desolated by the Romans.

When the Lord has a number of believing servants and faithful ministers in a land, and they enjoy toleration and protection, a hopeful symptom remains. Their example, prayers, and exertions in various ways, prevent a total prevalence of impiety and iniquity. "They are "the salt and the light of the land:" and for their sakes the Lord delays national judgements, and executes vengeance on the individuals who provoke his indignation. But prevailing divisions among professed believers, attended with lukewarmness, formality, loose principles, extravagant sentiments, and scandalous practice, tend to subvert this bulwark of our country. The gradual but effectual success of those, who "privily bring in damnable heresies" into congregations and bodies of men, hitherto steadily attached to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel; with the progress of infidelity on every side, are "signs of the times," which threaten to deprive us of our last ground of confidence.

If the present generation of pious Christians should be taken from the evil to come, and be succeeded by such, "as have the form of godliness but deny the power of it;" and if the number of zealous defenders of the truth should decrease, and timid, feeble advocates be substituted in their room; it is very probable that the Lord may permit the open enemies of Christianity to prevail for a season. In this case persecution may waste, or drive to a distance the faithful remnant, suppress the testimony of the witnesses, and prevent the public profession of the gospel: thus the light will be obscured or extinguished, and the candlestick removed, while infidelity and atheism will exult and triumph. Should this take place, no doubt the flood-gates of national judgements will be opened; and the vengeance of the Lord against our flagrant contempt and defiance of him be made manifest to all the world. This was the course of events in Judea, especially from the death of Josiah to the captivity: and when scarcely a man could be found to intercede for the land, the wrath of God was poured out upon them like an irresistible deluge. The same was still more remarkable, after the Jews in our Lord's

Digitized by Google

time had filled up the measure of their iniquities: for the persecuted Christians separated from among them when the Romans invaded the land, and then wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Something analagous hath been commonly observed in the desolations of countries professing Christianity: and when we consider the dire calamities that have befallen a neighbouring nation, (for dire they have been, in what way soever they may terminate,) we may well recollect our Lord's words, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." In the meanwhile the Lord waits to be gracious: and who can tell, but that faith and prayer may prevail, and that a timely repentance and reformation may yet take place, and "so iniquity shall not be our ruin."

V. Then I proceed to deduce some instructions and admonitions, suited to the present emergency.

When Sennacherib invaded Judah, with a powerful army, uttering the most dreadful menaces and blasphemies; the pious king sent to the prophet Isaiah, stating the case to him, and saying "Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left:" and he himself spread the haughty Assyrian's letter before the Lord, and earnestly intreated his gracious interposition. Hezekiah indeed desired the prayers of an eminent prophet, who had long been employed in the honourable service: yet I apprehend, that we may properly consider his message to Isaiah, as a divine admonition to us at the present crisis. The providence of God hath formed a special relation between us and the land in which we live, similar to those we bear to our parents or children: we are therefore peculiarly bound to pray for its peace and welfare; for the captive Jews were commanded to pray for the peace of the country in which they had peace. We have received, and still enjoy manifold advantages, temporal and spiritual, in this our favoured land; and we, or our descendants, shall probably participate the future prosperity or adversity, the blessings or calamities, that await the nation. Our personal transgressions form no small part of that guilt which calls for divine judgments on the land: and our lukewarmness and inconsistent conduct, as Christians, have helped to provoke God to deprive us of our religious privileges. It would therefore be a foolish hypocrisy in us, on this day of fasting and humiliation, to arraign the conduct of other men, and excuse our own.

On these and many other accounts it is our undeniable duty "to lift up our prayer for the remnant that is left." There is still a remnant among us of real believers; there is still ground for hope in the Lord's mercy; "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" the most eminent believers who prayed with signal success were men of like passions with us: even Isaiah once cried out, "Woe is me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips;" and yet his prayers were most effectually answered. It is likewise undeniable, that our enemies, like Sennacherib, want to subvert our holy religion, as well as our temporal prosperity: and this suggests a powerful plea in lifting up our prayer for national deliverance.

But it is confidently asserted by numbers, that prayers, offered on such occasions, are the dictates of revenge, ambition, or avarice. If avowed infidels alone held such language, it would not excite our surprise: but it is indeed most astonishing, that men, pretending to believe the Bible, should condemn a practice approved and commanded in every part of the Sacred Volume! Let us, however, examine how Hezekiah prayed.—"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who dwellest between the cherubim," (that is above the mercy-seat;) "thou art the God, even thou alone, of the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries; and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our

Digitized by Google

God, save us from his hand, that all the kings of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." Isaiah xxxvii. 15—20. Nothing can be plainer, than that zeal for the honour of God and the interests of true religion principally dictated this prayer. The Lord indeed answered it, "by terrible things in righteousness:" but Hezekiah had only asked deliverance for his people, not destruction on his enemies; and his expanded charity made him earnestly desire that all the kings of the earth might know the difference between the true God, and worthless idols, and that they might diffuse that knowledge among their subjects.

I would not knowingly offer one prayer on this occasion, which could not be answered consistently with our enemies enjoying peace, security, true liberty, good government, and the blessings of true religion: but we may pray that the Lord would "abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices," (that is, their devices against the peace of other lands, or the Christian religion,) in entire consistency with these friendly dispositions towards them: for such things would conduce to their advantage, as well as our own. We may not ask the Lord to aggrandize or enrich our nation, that she may reign over all countries, or engross all the commerce of the world: but surely we may pray that famine, pestilence, hostile invasions, and evil discords may be averted; that there may be employment and food for the poor, peace in our borders, and the continuance of our civil and religious liberties. Above all we should pray for the peace, purity, and enlargement of the church; that it may please the Lord to illuminate all the ministers of religion, with true knowledge and understanding of his word, 'that both by their preaching and living they may set it forth and shew it accordingly,' that labourers may be sent "forth into the harvest; "that the Spirit of God may lift up a standard" against the torrent of infidelity, impiety, and vice, that inundates the land; and that all ranks and orders of men may be endued with wisdom and grace, to serve God and their generation faithfully and successfully. Such prayers as these may be branched out into a variety of particulars, without indulging sinful passions, or violating the law of love. And if we pray in faith, depending on the Lord alone, and not on an arm of flesh; and duly considering his almighty power and abundant mercy as fully adequate to all our necessities and difficulties, we may yet hope that he may be intreated for the land, and prolong our tranquillity.

But without personal repentance we cannot offer such supplications as these. It therefore behoves every one of us to consider our ways, to examine our hearts, humbly to confess our sins, to seek forgiveness, and to pray for grace that we may henceforth walk before God in newness of life. If any persons have hitherto continued impenitent and unbelieving; they should on this occasion set about the great concerns of their immortal souls, with peculiar diligence and earnestness. Otherwise, whether the Lord spare the land or not, he will not spare them. "Woe be to the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." Isaiah iii. 11.

Even real Christians, at such a time as this, are called upon to review their lives, and renew their humiliation for all their past sins, as a part of the guilt accumulated by the land. They should especially consider their conduct as professors of the gospel, and inquire in what particulars they have dishonoured their profession, misled or weakened their brethren, or given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. We ought also to examine what fruit hath been produced by the solemnities, professions, instructions and prayers of the last season of fasting and humiliation. We should ask ourselves, whether we have really acted consistently with them, and been more fruitful, zealous, and conscientious than before? Thus we shall be prepared to plead with him as his children and friends, in the manner that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Jehoshaphat, and others of old did; and prevailing with him we shall prevail with man also.

But we must likewise remember, that we are bound to use our influence and improve our talents, by every exertion, to promote the cause, and ob-

Digitized by Google

tain the blessings, for which we pray; both in our families and private circles, and in more public stations. Thus we should *seek*, as well as *pray for*, the peace of the community, the prosperity of the church, the reformation of manners, and removal of every occasion or encouragement given to vice and impiety. If indeed we are decidedly for the Lord, and determine to follow him fully, without regard to men or dread of consequences; our conduct will have a considerable effect: for the example, endeavours, and prayers of his faithful people are the means, by which our national character must be improved, and our privileges continued to us.

Let such as profess to turn unto him that smiteth them, take care they do not rest in notions, forms, or external reformation, without true conversion, repentance, faith, and holiness. The prophet took notice of persons answering this description, when he said, "They return, but not to the Most High." Hosea vii. 16. And nothing more effectually prevents the conversion of sinners, than a mistaken idea that they are already converted.

Charity to the poor and afflicted is likewise an essential concomitant of acceptable fasting and humiliation: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,—then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer. If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon day." Isaiah lviii. 6—12.

Finally, my brethren, if you thus return to the Lord, and seek his face, I am sent to you with encouraging words. "Let the heart of those rejoice that seek the Lord." "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." "In the time of famine they shall have enough."—"Though the fig-tree should not blossom," and every resource should fail, "yet they may rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation." Be not therefore "afraid of evil tidings; let your heart be fixed, trusting in the Lord." If you hear of "wars and rumours of wars, see that you be not troubled." Should a deluge come, the Lord will prepare you an ark, in which you may be secure and comfortable: and he will say unto you, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." Isaiah xxvi. 20, 21.

SERMON XVIII.

PREACHED ON GOOD-FRIDAY, 1795.

CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD.

JOHN, I. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

JOHN Baptist, the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, was doubtless well-informed of his person, offices, and kingdom. He prepared the way of the Lord by preaching repentance, as indispensably necessary to a participation of the blessings about to be communicated to mankind; and while he baptized

Digitized by Google

the people with water, as an outward emblem of their souls being washed from sin; he declared that the Redeemer would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He bare witness to him, as the Son of God, the Bridegroom of the Church, and "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." He cried, saying, "This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me: and of his fulness have we all received." He added on another occasion, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth upon him." John iii. 35, 36.

It is evident, that this most eminent servant of God, laboured to communicate to his disciples exalted apprehensions of the Lord Jesus, and to excite in them large expectations from him. In honouring the Son of God he was willing to abase himself, "as unworthy to loose his shoe latchet." He was astonished to think the Saviour should come to be baptized of him, when he was conscious that as a sinner he stood in need of Christ's spiritual baptism: and when we consider the excellency of John's character, with the extraordinary things spoken of him in Scripture; we shall know what inferences to draw from his testimony. Certainly he would not have concurred with those, who employ all their abilities in trying to persuade mankind, not to think too highly of Christ,—not to honour him too much,—and not to depend on him too entirely in the great concerns of eternal salvation.—But the words of the text must be exclusively our present subject; and from them we may inquire,

I. On what account Christ is called "The Lamb of God."
II. The import of the words, "Who taketh away the sin of the world."
III. The call to "Behold the Lamb of God."
IV. The peculiar instructions to be derived from meditating on this subject.

I. On what account is the Lord Jesus called "The Lamb of God."

We should not forget, my brethren, that the language of Scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit, and demands our most reverent attention on that account. If then we interpret it in a general way, and treat those metaphors, under which divine mysteries are revealed, as we would do the language of mere men, who often use pompous words and extravagant figures of speech without much meaning, we shall be found guilty of despising the sacred oracles of God. No doubt every metaphor or illustration was selected, in preference to all others, for some wise and holy reasons; and suggests important instruction to the teachable student. This must especially be the case, with that expression of the text, which engages our present attention: because it frequently occurs with reference to the character, sufferings, and salvation of Christ.

A lamb is the well-known emblem of innocence, gentleness, patience, and purity: and no doubt an allusion was made to these things in speaking of the Redeemer as the Lamb of God. Yet we cannot suppose that this was the principal meaning of that appellation, when we duly consider the various passages in which it is used: for in what sense could a lamb *take away sin*, except by becoming an atoning sacrifice.

The slaughter of innocent animals, and consuming of the whole or some part of their bodies upon an altar, was an essential part of religious worship, from the entrance of sin to the death of Christ. Those animals alone were used for this purpose, which were man's valued and useful property, and the most perfect in the kind: but lambs were by far the most common oblation. Thus Abel *by faith* brought the firstlings of his flock as an offering unto the Lord, and was accepted; but *faith* must have reference to a divine testimony, command, or appointment: this Cain disregarded, "leaning to his own understanding," and virtually denying his need of an atonement; and there-

Digitized by Google

fore he was rejected. No sooner was Noah liberated from the ark than he offered burnt-offerings to the Lord: Gen. viii. 20, 21: and doubtless the general opinion, that such sacrifices were proper to appease the anger of the gods, was derived from original tradition; for it seems to have no ground at all in human reasonings.

When Abraham, at God's command, went with full purpose of heart to offer his beloved son for a burnt-offering, Isaac, being acquainted with the customary oblations, said, "My father,—where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?—And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." Gen. xxii. 7, 8. Under the law, a lamb was the daily sacrifice, morning and evening: and on the Sabbath-days this was doubled. Thus harmless lambs, free from all spot and blemish, were presented day by day; while the priest, as representative of the congregation, laid his hands on the head of the sacrifice, and doubtless confessed over it the sins of Israel, which typically were by imputation laid upon it. Then the blood of the lamb was shed; and its body prepared and burnt upon the altar, by the fire which came down from heaven, as an emblem of the divine justice inflicting vengeance on the guilty. And when the blood had been sprinkled and poured out, according to the appointment; the priest went into the sanctuary, and burned incense on the golden altar, while all the people prayed without in the courts of the temple. Lev. i. 4. xvi. 21. Num. xxviii. 3—10. Luke i. 9. 10.

But the paschal lambs, which immensely exceeded in number all other sacrifices that were offered, (when the law was regularly observed,) were most emphatically prefigurative of Christ and his atonement. The unblemished Lamb for every family was selected four days before the passover, when it was sacrificed in the presence of the elders and congregation of Israel: its blood was then sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of their houses: and its body roasted whole, was eaten within by all the professed people of God. The feast was celebrated with unleavened bread, and they were directed to eat it with bitter herbs, and with staves in their hands; in remembrance of their affliction in Egypt, their preservation when the first-born were slain, and their marvellous deliverance from bondage. The apostle teaches us how to interpret these things when he says, "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. He is the true paschal Lamb, the spotless sacrifice for sin: he was predicted four thousand years before his coming in the flesh; and at length he was crucified for us, at the demand and in the presence of the rulers and people of Israel. His intense sufferings, from the fiery wrath of God against our sins, answered to the prescribed roasting of the paschal lamb. The profession of faith in his blood, externally places the soul under the divine protection, while vengeance is denounced against unbelievers: but the inward experience of true Christians, who secretly 'feed on Christ in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving,' corresponds with their avowed dependence on him. In genuine sincerity and simplicity of heart, they exercise repentance, and mourn for their sins: they deny themselves, take up their cross, and bear sanctified afflictions; and, being set at liberty from Satan's yoke, they set out on their pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan.

With allusion to these types, the apostle says, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." 1 Pet. i. 18—20. And John saw in his vision, "A door opened in heaven." "And there stood a Lamb *as it had been slain*;—and the four living creatures, and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb,—and they sang a new song, saying,—Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God with thy blood." The angels also joined these representatives of the universal church, "Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the

Digitized by Google

Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Rev. iv. 1. v. 6—13. On another occasion, the apostle "beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number,—stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, Salvation to our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb." "These are they, which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb; therefore they are before the throne of God;—and the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters." Rev. vii. 9—17.

It is evident that the emblem of a Lamb that had been slain, in all these places, refers to the death of Christ, as the sacrifice for our sins, and the antitype of all the legal sacrifices. "Without shedding of blood is no remission:" but "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats," or lambs, "could take away sins." Heb. ix. 22. x. 4. As therefore all that were pardoned and saved from the first entrance of sin, were partakers of the benefits arising from the one oblation of Christ once offered; so He is called "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Rev. xiii. 8.

It is my design in these citations, to remove every shadow of doubt, and every degree of hesitation from your minds, concerning the meaning of the words "The Lamb of God." The honour of the divine law and government, and the satisfaction of the divine justice in saving sinners, required an atonement of infinite value. The wisdom of God therefore planned this method of redemption, and Christ is the Lamb of God's appointment. "When he cometh into the world he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me, in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book," in the the opening of the roll of Scripture, "it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God." Heb. x. 4—10. All other methods of expiating guilt, and rendering the salvation of sinners honourable to God, were unavailing: but when the Lamb of God came, and offered himself as an atoning sacrifice, the required satisfaction was made, and no further oblations were necessary.

But this appointed atonement was likewise of God's *providing*. The plan of redemption by a sacrifice of infinite value would not have profited us sinners; if everlasting love had not provided such an oblation. The whole universe could not have supplied a single individual, whose dignity and excellency qualified him for such an undertaking; or whose love was so immense, as to influence him to interpose in our behalf. But "God spared not his own Son." He gave him to be the propitiation for our sins; he *accepted* the oblation which he had appointed and provided; and in all these respects, Christ is "the Lamb of God."—We proceed,

II. To consider the import of the words "Which taketh away the sin of the world."

The unblemished harmless lambs, which were sacrificed from the beginning, had no guilt of their own; yet they suffered as if they had been guilty. They were substituted in the place of the criminals; and the guilt or desert of punishment was typically transferred from the sinner to the sacrifice. It was imputed to the animal, who bare the punishment, while the offerer escaped: and it took away his sin by expiating the guilt of it. Thus the Lord Jesus was substituted in our place; our guilt was transferred to him by imputation: He was sinless, himself, and yet suffered as a sinner, in order "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life:" and in this manner he taketh away sin.

We are not, however, left to deduce this conclusion, from these types and shadows, or our own reasonings concerning them: for the sacred writers have most explicitly and energetically declared the same great truth. The prophet Isaiah, in his most wonderful prediction of the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer, says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was

Digitized by Google

bruised for our iniquities.—All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief: thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.—He shall bear their iniquities. He bare the sin of many." You see, my brethren, that Christ not only bare our *punishment*, but our *iniquities*: and this can imply nothing less, than actual translation of guilt from the sinner to the sacrifice. "It was exacted, and he became answerable."* He willingly consented to become our surety, to assume our flesh, and expiate our sins by his own suffering and death upon the cross. He was capable of doing this, and willing to do it. The human nature he assumed was preserved free from all contamination of sin: so that his life was not forfeited, or suffering deserved, by any personal transgression. He had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again, and no mere creature ever was or can be placed in a similar situation. "He loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet smelling savour." Eph. v. 2. The imputation of guilt no more implied criminality or pollution than the sacrificing of the harmless lamb rendered it sinful and defiled: or than a man becomes chargeable with the extravagance and profligacy of the poor insolvent, whom he liberates from prison by paying his debt, out of a most generous compassion.

And let us not suppose, that this language concerning Christ bearing our *sins*, was merely that of prophecy or poetry: for the writers of the New Testament, in didactive prose, are equally decisive, or even more so. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. v. 21. This certainly implies a reciprocal imputation of our sin to Christ, and of his righteousness to us. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal. iii. 13. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" 1 Peter ii. 24. iii. 18. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption, that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins—that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Romans iii. 24—26. These and many similar expressions, as connected with the institutions of the ceremonial law, and the reasonings of the apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, are abundantly sufficient to prove, not only that the doctrine of an atonement by the vicarious sufferings of Emmanuel is contained in Scripture, but that it is the most prominent and central part of revelation. This is confirmed by the appointment of the Lord's Supper, in perpetual remembrance of the death of Christ; and for a constant representation of the life of faith, under the figure of "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ." We may therefore confidently affirm, that they who deny or explain away this doctrine, prefer their own reasonings to God's sure testimony, and endeavour to remove the key-stone of an arch, the whole of which would at length fall down, if they could succeed. So that mere natural religion, which palliates and flatters human pride, will uniformly be preferred to the religion of the Bible, by all who lose sight of this fundamental doctrine: and facts do fully demonstrate that this has always in process of time been the consequence, when persons have argued themselves, and others, out of the ancient and orthodox interpretation of redemption by the Saviour's atoning blood.

But the present occasion admits not a fuller discussion of this important subject. The propitiatory oblation made by the Lamb of God, being of infinite value, was sufficient to take away the original and actual sin of mankind, as if it had been but one complex transgression. Millions in every age have received the benefit of it; and if the whole human race should at once apply for pardon and salvation by the blood of Christ; it would suffice to take away

* Bishop Lowth on Isaiah, liii. 7.

Digitized by Google

all their sin. The efficacy of the typical sacrifices was confined wholly to the Jewish nation: but that of the one atoning sacrifice of Christ extends equally to other nations. It is sent to them all without exception; and we can assure any sinner throughout the earth, that if he believe in the Son of God he shall be saved. So that none perish, because there is no help for them, but because pride, love of sin, and aversion to the spiritual service of God, harden their hearts in unbelief, and they "will not come to Christ that they might have life." In this sense "The Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world."

But he also taketh away guilt from the conscience by the *sprinkling* of his blood. 1 Peter i. 2. The atonement made upon the cross eventually profits none but those, who apply it to themselves. This is represented in the Lord's supper; as it was of old by the eating of the paschal lamb, with the sprinkling of its blood. We are not communicants merely by hearing of, or seeing, the emblems of Christ's body and blood, but by eating and drinking them. The Lord Jesus "who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time," 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. sends his gospel to sinners, and by the powerful convictions of the Holy Spirit, he effectually destroys their self-confidence; then their conscience becomes burdened with the guilt of their former sins; and whatever effects they use to get relief, all prove ineffectual, till they understand the nature, and see the suitableness and glory of redemption by the blood of Christ. Applying in true repentance and living faith for an interest in this propitiation, they find the load of guilt removed, and obtain stable peace, connected with deep humiliation, hatred of sin, watchfulness against it, acquaintance with the divine law and their own hearts, and great tenderness of conscience. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Heb. ix. 13, 14. x. 22. Nothing but this view of the cross, this application to the blood of sprinkling, this washing in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, can give that kind of peace and confidence which hath been described: because nothing else can shew the enlightened and humbled heart the divine justice and holiness, in harmony with mercy and truth, glorified in pardoning and saving the chief of sinners. And whenever this peace has been lost through relapses into sin, there is no other way of recovering it, but that in which it was at first obtained! nay, indeed, it cannot be preserved in the midst of those numberless imperfections and defilements, that accompany our best days and duties, except by continual application to the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin.

In consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit destroys in the heart of his disciples, the dominion, love, and pollution of sin; by means of the motives, encouragements, and ordinances of the gospel. In this sense also, "the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world:" for this is the only method, by which the hearts of men all over the world can be made holy; and all men in every nation of the earth, who believe in the name of Christ, are thus sanctified by faith in him." Acts xxvi. 18. "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Eph. v. 25—27. "You who were—enemies in your minds by wicked works; yet now hath he reconciled; in the body of his flesh through death; to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreproveable in his sight." Col. i. 21, 22. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus ii. 14. Thus will the Lamb of God continue to take away the sin of believers all over the world, till there be no remains of it left; and till the whole company shall be "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Jude 24.

Digitized by Google

III. Then we consider the call to "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

I shall confine myself to the exact import of the words, as spoken by John; but refer likewise to several other Scriptures of a similar nature. "There is no God else beside me, a just God and a Saviour;—look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Isaiah xlv. 21, 22. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John iii. 14, 15. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. xii. 2. The Baptist may be supposed to have addressed his disciples to this effect. 'You want pardon of your sins, and deliverance from the power and pollution of iniquity: "Behold then the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." He alone can confer these blessings; apply to him, become his disciples, rely on him entirely, and follow implicitly his directions; thus you will be saved, and be made instrumental to the salvation of your fellow-sinners!'

But we may understand the call in a more comprehensive sense, as an exhortation to meditate seriously and frequently on the great doctrines thus revealed; to behold and contemplate the person and redemption of Christ with fixed attention, and humble faith. He seems to address us from the cross, and to say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me; wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Lam. i. 12. Let us then turn our thoughts from all other subjects, and with believing application to ourselves, contemplate the interesting scene, which we this day commemorate.

We cannot well enter on such meditations, without adverting to the language of the sacred writers, concerning the essential and eternal deity of Christ, One with the Father, the Creator and Upholder of all worlds, the object of universal worship and adoration. We consider this glorious person coming in the flesh to be the Saviour of the world, to seek and save the lost, from mere love and compassion to deservedly perishing sinners. The spotless purity of his human nature; the perfection of his obedience to the divine law; the depth of his voluntary humiliation; the poverty, and contempt, and the contradiction of sinners, which he endured through life, demand our most serious attention. He effected not his gracious purposes in our behalf, as a monarch or a conqueror: he taught not as a philosopher or a moralist: "but he took upon him the form of a servant," and "gave his life a ransom for many."

We should, however, especially contemplate the variety and intenseness of his sufferings, in the closing scene of his humiliation: the excruciating pain he endured from the scourge, the thorns, and the nails, and when hanging on the accursed tree; with the anguish of mind he felt when agonizing in the garden, and when on the cross, he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is very important for us to reflect on what the Redeemer suffered from *men*; from the base treachery of Judas, the unfaithfulness of Peter, the cowardice of the disciples; the cruel injustice of Caiaphas, the scribes, priests, council, and even their servants; from the contempt and indignity put upon him by Herod and his men of war; the cruelty and scorn of Pilate's soldiers; the lingering tortures of the cross, the ingratitude of the insulting multitude, and the revilings even of the malefactors. We should recollect likewise, that this was the hour and power of darkness: and what gloomy imaginations, and detested thoughts might be presented to the mind of Christ, by the subtle and energetic influence of evil spirits, may be best conceived by those who "are not ignorant of their devices." "He suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to succour them that are tempted:" and the assault of Satan in the desert may convince us,

Digitized by Google

that he would do his utmost, when permitted, to bruise the heel of Him, who came to crush his head and destroy his works.

But we are also taught, that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief: and to make his soul an offering for sin." "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the shepherd." Zech. xiii. 7. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." And when we compare our Lord's agony in the garden, and his exclamation on the cross, with the conduct of his own disciples under the severest tortures: we must be convinced that his cup was embittered inconceivably more than theirs, and that consolations and supports were vouchsafed them, of which he was wholly left destitute.—We cannot explain this subject.—We may be certain, that remorse of conscience, despair, and the prevalence of hateful passions, which will eternally increase the misery of condemned sinners, could have no place in the mind of the holy Jesus: but whatever pain, shame, wrath, curse, agony, or misery, he could possibly endure; whatever the justice of God, the honour of the law, and the instruction of the universe in the evil and desert of sin, required; all this the Redeemer suffered, till he could say with his expiring breath, "It is finished."

It should likewise be remembered, that our Lord most willingly submitted to all these sufferings, from love to our souls and regard to the glory of God. No man had power to take away his life: the prince of this world had no part in him; no personal transgression exposed him to the sentence of death; but love, that passeth knowledge, moved him to give himself a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins! The meekness, patience, and persevering fortitude, with which our Lord suffered, should not pass unnoticed. "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered he threatened not." 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

The circumstances attending his crucifixion, also form a proper subject of meditation. The sun was miraculously darkened, as a token of the divine displeasure, and an emblem of the gloom which overspread the Sun of righteousness. Yet in this deep humiliation of the Lord of glory, he rescued one perishing sinner from the jaws of destruction, and took him with him to paradise. When he expired, "the vail of the temple was rent;" the rocks were torn by an earthquake, the graves were opened, and the preparation made for the resurrection of those saints, who were appointed to grace the triumph of the rising and ascending Saviour. For the event of his sufferings in his personal exaltation, and the complete salvation, in body and soul, of all the unnumbered myriads, which ever did, or ever shall believe in him, is the last particular, to which our present meditations should be directed. But it is time for us to proceed,

IV. To consider the peculiar instructions to be derived from these contemplations.

The worth of our immortal souls is most emphatically taught us by the cross of Christ. "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Could any one literally gain the whole universe, as the price of iniquity, and keep it with every imaginable advantage during the term of human life; it could neither preserve his body from the grave, nor his soul from eternal misery! "It costs more to redeem the soul: that must be let alone for ever." View the Saviour agonizing in Gethsemane, and expiring on the cross! Did he endure these unknown sufferings to preserve men from temporal poverty, pain, or death? By no means: but to deliver them from the wrath to come; where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Who can doubt then, that an immortal soul is man's principal treasure? It is possessed by the meanest, and it infinitely exceeds in value all the distinctions of the mightiest. He who made the soul knows its worth: and he deemed

Digitized by Google

it so valuable, that he ransomed our souls from ruin, at the price of his own blood. Shall we not then deem the salvation of them our grand concern, and regard all interfering objects as unworthy our notice in the comparison? If we would never succeed in any one thing all our lives, except in this main concern, our felicity will be congratulated by angels to eternity; if we should prosper in all other respects, and fail here, our folly and misery will be lamented and execrated for ever.

Our children also have immortal souls. Does then our love of them induce us to use every means of providing for their comfort in this world? and shall it not influence us to proportionable earnestness in seeking their salvation? O cruel and infatuated parents, who take excessive care about the bodies of your children, and leave their precious souls to perish everlastingly for want of diligent instruction; or perhaps even help to murder them by indulging their sinful dispositions, and setting them a bad example! Nay, let us further learn to consider, that our relatives, neighbours, and enemies, have immortal souls, because they are so valuable. "He that winneth souls is wise:" let us then think nothing too much to expend or attempt in promoting that grand object, for which the Son of God shed his precious blood.

But viewed in this glass, how vain does the world, and all things in it appear! "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." What are empires, or the loss of them? What renown, or infamy? What affluence or poverty? What the most exquisite pleasure or torturing pain, when put in competition with eternal happiness or misery? or when viewed in connection with the cross of Christ? Had he not so loved us, all possible prosperity could not have prevented our everlasting misery: if we believe in him, all possible adversity cannot prevent our everlasting happiness. Let us not then envy the wealthy and successful, but pity and pray for them; let us not covet worldly things, repine for want of them, or lament the loss of them: let us not join in the vain mirth of condemned sinners, or be satisfied with any thing short of the joy of God's salvation.

By contemplating the cross of Christ, we may learn the perfection of God's justice and holiness, the excellency of his law, and the desert of sinners. In the condemnation of fallen angels and wicked men, and in many other awful ways, the Lord hath proclaimed his abhorrence of iniquity, and his determination to magnify his holy law: yet his mercy not being visible in those events, it might have been thought, either that he was incapable of shewing mercy, or that in exercising mercy he would abate from the demands of justice, and connive at transgression. But the subject before us, well understood, confutes all such vain imaginations. When mercy triumphed most illustriously, justice was most gloriously displayed, the law most honoured, and sin most exposed to universal detestation. 'Rather,' says the Saviour, 'will I bear the curse of the divine law, and the punishment of sin, in my own person, and make an expiation of infinite value by my sufferings and death upon the cross, than either leave sinners to perish without help, or allow the law to be dishonoured, and justice to be relaxed for their benefit.' "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea we establish the law."

Here again we may learn repentance, and abhorrence of our iniquities. "They shall look on me, whom they pierced, and mourn." The more lovely and glorious the divine perfections appear, the more excellent the holy law, and the more hateful and destructive transgression are found to be; the deeper should be our sorrow and remorse, while we recollect and review all our numerous and heinous offences, and all their aggravations; and the more ought we to dread and hate those evil propensities, from which all our crimes proceed, and which continually aim, as it were, to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to open shame." When we view the miseries of the world, and the ravages of death, we may well inquire, "Who slew all these?" And the consideration may help to abase us for sin, and excite us to oppose and crucify our lusts, which are the murderers of the whole human race, and

Digitized by Google

menace our destruction. Yet the cross of Christ, when duly contemplated, suggests far more powerful motives for contrition and self-abhorrence, and will far more effectually influence us to seek the destruction of those hated enemies, that crucified the Lord of glory.

But the same object will likewise teach us, that neither our repentance or amendment, nor any thing else we can do, will at all serve to expiate our guilt, or justify us in the sight of God. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain." Men set up a variety of reasonings against the express and numerous testimonies of God to this leading truth; and thus vainly "go about to establish their own righteousness." But a serious view of the Lamb of God, as taking away the sin of the world, may convince us that every hope they form of escaping condemnation or obtaining life, except by faith in a crucified Saviour, will most surely prove fallacious and ruinous: for if any thing else would as effectually have answered the purposes of God, he would doubtless have spared his own Son, and saved sinners in some other way.

On the other hand, we here behold the riches of the divine compassion, and tender mercy towards the sinful children of men. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If then God so loved us when enemies, what may not those expect from him, who renounce every other plea, and flee for refuge to lay hold on this hope set before them? In every penitent who supplicates mercy for the sake of Christ and his atoning blood, the Redeemer "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied:" for this very purpose he suffered and died on the cross, "that he might become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him:" and on this ground we say, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." And, "if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

But while we mingle our tears of godly sorrow with joyful thanksgivings, and glory in Christ Jesus amidst all our tribulations; let us also, my brethren, look to the cross, and learn our obligations to the most self-denying and devoted obedience. Can we, with this object full in view, deem any expence too great, any sacrifice too costly, any cross too heavy, or labour too severe, which his glory, the authority of his command, or the benefit of his purchased flock, call us to undergo? Surely the constraining love of Christ will render every loss or suffering tolerable, yea pleasant, to the thankful believer; while he beholds the Lamb of God, expiring on the cross to take away that sin, which would otherwise have eternally ruined his soul; and to purchase for him everlasting and unutterable felicity!

Here too we must look, that we may learn patience, meekness, spirituality, and every part of that holiness to which we are called. Hence we must draw our motives and encouragements; and here we must view that perfect example, which we are required to copy. Forgiveness of injuries, love of enemies, perseverance in well-doing, amidst insult, contempt, and ingratitude, and compassion to perishing sinners, are best learned by looking to the cross; by witnessing the triumph of divine love in the sufferings of Emmanuel, and hearing him mingle his dying groans with prayers for his cruel and insulting murderers.

Meditation on this subject may also convince us, that we must expect tribulation in the world, and the enmity or contempt of unbelievers, if we belong to Christ, and bear his image. His wisdom, holiness, and love, were perfect: yet no one of our race ever experienced such hatred and insult from all ranks, orders, and descriptions of men, as the spotless Lamb of God! Malefactors commonly meet with some pity amidst their tortures, however merited; but Jews and Gentiles, rulers, scribes, priests, soldiers, and the multitude, could unite in cruel mockery of the holy Jesus, when expiring on a cross! Away then with all those flattering sentiments of human nature,

Digitized by Google

resent it as loving and delighting in genuine excellency: the cross and the sufferings of his most faithful servants in every age, form trative confutation of the proud delusion! And if our hearts have been changed by divine grace, so that we love and imitate the lowly and holy Saviour; let us count our cost, expect scorn and hatred from men, tribulation in the world, and peace and consolation from the Lord alone. Let us also look beyond the cross, and contemplate the glory which followed; that we may not be wearied and faint in our minds. We too have a joy set before us: let us then endure our lighter cross, and despise the shame; assured that if we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him in glory.

But my fellow-sinners, where will you appear at his second coming to judge the world, if you now neglect his great salvation? If you join his enemies; and, by cleaving to your sins, prefer Barabbas to Jesus, sell him as Judas did for a few pieces of silver, or determine you will not have him to reign over you? Still he invites you to come to him that you may have life eternal: Oh that you would seek to him as a Saviour, who will shortly come to be your judge.

In fine, contemplating the cross of Christ teaches us most effectually every lesson contained in the sacred Scriptures. Let us then, my brethren, further prosecute our meditations at the Lord's table; and while we remember the love and sufferings of our Redeemer, let us renew our repentance and acceptance of his salvation, and give up ourselves to his service; that, "as bought with a price, we may glorify him with our bodies and spirits, which are his."

SERMON XIX.

PREACHED ON EASTER-SUNDAY, 1796.

ON THE RESURRECTION.

1 COR. XV. 20.

Now is Christ risen from the dead.

We learn from this chapter, that certain persons among the Corinthians had denied the doctrine of a resurrection; probably explaining away the apostolical language on that subject as figurative, and only meaning conversion, or that change which took place in the world by the introduction of Christianity. 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18. In confuting this dangerous error, the apostle called their attention to the resurrection of Christ as an undeniable fact: and he shewed, that the denial of a resurrection was equivalent to saying that Christ was not risen; and thus tended to subvert the foundation of Christianity, and to destroy the hopes and comforts of believers. "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not Christ risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain: yea, and we are found false witnesses for God. And if Christ be not raised,—ye are yet in your sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." All the joys and supports of Christians are inseparably connected with future and eternal felicity; without the hope of which they would have nothing to counterbalance their peculiar trials and conflicts.

If Christ were not risen, believers were yet in their sins, and even the martyrs had finally perished. But were not the primitive Christians converted from idols to serve the living and true God? Did they not repent

Digitized by Google

and do works meet for repentance? Were they not exemplary in the practice of all good works? And did they not meet death for the sake of a good conscience towards God? How then could they be yet in their sins?—Because, none of these things could atone for their transgressions; and, if Christ were not risen, no effectual atonement had been made: they must therefore have still continued under condemnation, and exposed to the curse of the law they had broken. A most conclusive proof, that the death of Christ was a vicarious satisfaction for sin; and that none can be saved, who are not interested in that atonement.

It is deemed uncandid to charge men's doctrines with the consequences resulting from them; especially if they do not seem to perceive them. Yet I apprehend we should feel ourselves bound to warn people against the consequences of taking a poisonous mixture, even if he who administered it seemed not aware of its nature: and the apostle has here set us the example of doing the same, in opposing erroneous doctrines by which immortal souls are fatally deceived.

He then adds the words of the text, "Now is Christ risen from the dead," and proceeds to treat very copiously on the doctrine of the resurrection. But I shall confine myself to the subject before us, and attempt,

I. To prove that Christ is risen from the dead.
II. To shew the inferences which may be drawn from that event.
III. To apply the subject to ourselves.

I. I shall prove that Christ is risen.

Though true Christians have "a witness in themselves," which satisfies their minds in general, as to the certainty of the things which they have believed; yet, in peculiar seasons of temptation, an acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity would tend greatly to their establishment. And in these times of infidelity and scepticism, all who would "contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints," should be able to give a reason of their hope to every inquirer or objector; both to defend themselves from the charge of enthusiasm and credulity; to obviate the doubts of those with whom they converse; and to preserve young persons, perhaps their own children, from the fatal contagion.—It is therefore greatly to be lamented, that pious persons are in general so little furnished with this sort of knowledge, of which they might make such important uses.

It is commonly said, that the New Testament is built upon the foundation of the Old, and must stand or fall along with it: and there is a truth in this sentiment, though it be somewhat diverse in its nature and consequences, from that which is generally supposed. Our Lord and his apostles have so frequently quoted the Old Testament, and almost every part of it, as the *Scripture, the word of God*, the *oracles of God*, and *the language of the Holy Ghost*; that their credit must be connected with the divine inspiration of the books thus repeatedly attested by them. We are able to prove, that the canon of the Old Testament in those days differed very little, if at all, from that which we have at present, yet our Lord referring to different parts of it, says, "Thus it is written, and thus it must be," "the Scripture cannot be broken," "the Scriptures must needs be fulfilled." And the apostles say, "All Scripture is given by inspiration from God:" "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." This single consideration completely establishes the whole of the Old Testament as a divine revelation, with all those who duly reverence the words of Christ and his apostles. In all other respects the New Testament stands on its own basis, and is proved to be the word of God by distinct evidence: it affords unspeakably more support to the Old Testament than it receives from it: and the resurrection of Christ alone is sufficient to authenticate the whole sacred volume.

The restoration of a dead body to life is no more difficult to omnipotence, than the production of life at first. The divine operation is in both respects

Digitized by Google

alike incomprehensible; but as we continually observe life to be communicated in a certain way, we call that the law of nature, though we understand not our own meaning, and cannot explain how causes produce their effects. But dead bodies do not return to life, in the ordinary course of human affairs: we therefore suppose some law of nature to the contrary; the violation of which in any particular instance, we should call a miracle; that is a divine interposition and operation to produce an effect, above or contrary to the general energy of second causes. Some persons indeed pretend that this is impossible: but "why should it be thought incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" The power exerted is no greater, than that by which thousands of infants receive new life every day: and will man presume to say that God cannot, or shall not, exert his power in any way, which they have never before observed?—If a sufficient reason can be assigned for his extraordinary interposition, and the fact be indisputably proved; it becomes as credible as other well attested events, many of which do not coincide with our expectations or ideas of probability.

Universal history, observation, and experience prove that "the world lieth in wickedness." Idolatry, superstition, impiety and every kind of vice and misery have, in all ages covered and desolated the earth. But it hath pleased God of his infinite mercy, to reveal himself to sinful men; to make known a way in which they might be reconciled to him and recovered to holiness; and thus to introduce a religion suited to rectify the disorders of the world, and unite the honour of his name with the eternal happiness of unnumbered millions. Miracles, and the resurrection of the Redeemer especially, formed a suitable demonstration that this religion came from God; and served to arrest the attention of mankind: for alas, sinners for the most part are too much occupied about the affairs of this life, to notice those things which relate to God and their eternal state.—These are the reasons assigned for a divine interposition on this occasion; and more important cannot possibly be conceived.

The Jews, the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, preserve, with profound veneration and scrupulous care, the books of the Old Testament, which have been handed down in the same manner from generation to generation, during a long succession of ages. These books evidently contain a system of prophecy, centering in the person and redemption of the Messiah; and, among other particulars, his sufferings and death are circumstantially foretold, with clear intimations of his resurrection and subsequent glorious kingdom. Psalm ii. xvi. 8—11. Isaiah lii. 10—12.

We know also, that the gospels were made public in the earliest ages of Christianity; for they are continually quoted and referred to by those writers, whose works have been preserved: and from them we learn, that our Lord predicted his own death and resurrection on the third day, in so explicit a manner, that the Jewish rulers were aware of it, and took their measures accordingly. Yet when the body of Christ was delivered to Joseph, they were so fully satisfied by what they saw and heard, of his being really dead, that they made no objection on that ground: but they requested Pilate that the sepulchre might be securely closed, and guarded by Roman soldiers, till the third day was past, lest the disciples should steal his body, and say that he was risen again. After all their precautions, however, the body was gone, and they were never able to shew by whom it was removed, or what became of it.

Here let us pause, that we may consider the credibility of testimony.—One consistent witness, of sound understanding and fair character, who has no apparent interest in deceiving, is often deemed sufficient to determine the sentence of life or death, the most important of all temporal concerns; but if three or four such witnesses should agree in deposing, that they saw such a murder or robbery committed by the prisoner at the bar; no sober man could doubt of the fact, or scruple to pronounce him guilty.—Now there were twelve appointed witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, of plain good under-

Digitized by Google

standing, and unexceptionable character: for Peter's denial of his Lord, through the force of sudden temptation, forms no impeachment of his integrity; seeing he so honestly confessed his guilt, and so fully proved the sincerity of his repentance by his subsequent conduct: and when Judas by transgression fell, another was chosen in his place. These witnesses had constantly attended Jesus during some years, and must have been competent to know him from all other men. They were remarkably incredulous respecting his resurrection; and his crucifixion seems almost to have extinguished their hopes: how then can it be supposed, that they would have attempted to overpower or deceive the vigilant and valiant Roman soldiers, and to steal the body of Jesus? In so desperate an undertaking they must have been sure to excite the combined rage of both the Jewish and Roman rulers; and success itself could only expose them to hatred, persecution, and all kinds of hardships and sufferings. It is manifest, that from the time they began to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ, they renounced all prospects of worldly interest, ease, or greatness; and willingly embraced poverty, contempt, bonds, stripes, and perils as their portion. So that no possible account can be given of their conduct; unless it be ascribed to a principle of conscience: while the strict and exact morality of their writings demonstrates that they could not be actuated by false principles; for they do not allow men, in any case, to do evil that good may come; and they condemn all kinds of imposition with the most decided severity. Is it then possible for human beings, deliberately to choose temporal and eternal misery, and to persevere in decided adherence to a plan, which, on their own principles, insures their damnation in another world, as well as a complication of miseries in this present life?

The witnesses of our Lord's resurrection survived that event for a long time; some of them near forty years, and John still more. They were after a while separated into different parts of the world; and seemed to have no common interest, except in the success of Christianity: they passed through a series of the severest trials, and almost all of them died martyrs in the cause; but no change of circumstance or situation, no promises or threatenings of men, no repeated tortures or impending dangers, induced one of them in the smallest degree, to waver in his testimony. They declared unanimously, that on the third morning after the crucifixion, a vision of angels told some of their company at the sepulchre that their Lord was risen: that afterwards they all saw him repeatedly: that they examined his hands, feet, and side, and were sure it was the same body which had been nailed to the cross: that he ate and drank with them several times: that at length, after giving them particular instructions relative to their future conduct, he ascended from among them, till a cloud intercepted their sight of him; and that two angels appearing to them declared he was gone to heaven. Such an unwavering, persevering testimony of twelve persons, whose holy lives, diligent labours, disinterestedness, and patient sufferings evince their sincerity, forms such a complete proof, that in any other case, he who should not be satisfied with it, would be deemed sceptical almost to insanity.

This is, however, but a small part of the evidence afforded us in this most important concern. Saul the persecutor was a man endued with superior talents cultivated by education, and possessed of peculiar advantages for rising in the world; of which he was evidently availing himself, while gratifying his implacable enmity to the gospel. Yet was he, all at once, converted into a most zealous preacher of that faith he had attempted to destroy: and renouncing all his former principles and worldly prospects, yea, exasperating above measure his powerful patrons and employers, he spent all the remnant of his days in the most self-denying labours, hardships, and sufferings, endured with the greatest alacrity, for the sake of Christ and the gospel; and at length he sealed his testimony with his blood. How can this fact be accounted for, unless we allow the truth of his narrative concerning the manner of his conversion! And if that be allowed, the resurrection of Christ is demonstrated.

Digitized by Google

In the chapter whence our text is taken, this man declares, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remained to that time. This was an appeal to nearly three hundred living witnesses of that event: but no one ever attempted to disprove the truth of his assertion; though false teachers would have concurred with open enemies in such an attempt, had it been practicable.

The testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Jesus implied a charge of the most complicated wickedness against the rulers of the Jewish nation: these had the power in their hands, and were every way concerned to vindicate their characters, and punish those who thus accused them. This might readily have been done, had they produced the Roman soldiers in court, to testify that the body of Jesus had been stolen, or have stated in what way it was removed from the sepulchre.

But in fact they had bribed the soldiers to circulate a self-contradictory report on this subject, which would not bear investigation: and when Matthew soon afterwards charged this publicly upon them, and declared that the story was generally current among the Jews to that time; no one attempted to deny or disprove the charge. In every case of this nature, silence must be construed into a confession of guilt: and if the rulers could have accounted for the removal of the body, without either admitting the truth of Matthew's charge or our Lord's resurrection, no doubt can reasonably be made, but they would have done it in the most public manner.

Every reflecting person must perceive, that the evidence is completely satisfactory, provided it can be made clear, that these books were published at the time to which they refer. To obviate therefore every doubt on that head, without engaging in an argument far too complicated for this occasion, I would inquire, at what subsequent time it could have been possible to obtain credit to writings of this description? If a manuscript, said to have been long concealed in some library, be produced or published, as the work of an eminent author, who flourished two or three centuries ago; it immediately is subjected to a severe scrutiny, and imposture in such cases seldom escapes detection. But writings which contain a circumstantial narrative of "things not done in a corner," but in the open view of mankind, during several years; and connected with an epistolary correspondence resulting from them; could never have obtained the least credit in the world; if published after the times referred to, with an express appeal to mankind, that they all along had been familiarly acquainted with them. Such an insolent attempt, to persuade whole nations out of their senses and understandings, must have excited universal astonishment and indignation: or, had it been possible to convince a few individuals that they had received these books from their ancestors, and been taught from infancy to revere them as the writings of the apostles, when in fact neither they nor any other persons had ever before seen or heard of them; the effrontery of the deceivers and the credulity of the deceived must have constituted an unprecedented event, and marked the age in which it occurred. As therefore no time can be mentioned, when any attempt of this kind is so much as hinted at, by either Christian, Jewish, or Pagan historians; we might be confident, that the writings in question were extant, and well known in the church, from the very period in which they are said to have been published, even had we no other evidence. But no impartial man of learning can be imposed upon by pretences of this kind; having access to proofs of another nature in abundance: and this argument is principally adduced for the benefit of those who have neither leisure or advantages, for these investigations.

We should also remember, that on the day of Pentecost, immediately following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the assembled apostles, with such extraordinary circumstances, as drew together vast multitudes who then resided at Jerusalem. In the presence of all these witnesses, they spoke fluently and correctly in the languages of the several countries from which their hearers were collected, though it was certainly

Digitized by Google

known that they had not had the opportunity of learning them: and this stupendous miracle, together with Peter's sermon on the occasion, was made effectual to the conversion of three thousand persons. The gifts of tongues, and of working miracles in the name of Jesus, were ever after continued to them, and were frequently exercised in the most public and undeniable manner, before numerous witnesses, enemies as well as friends. The same powers were likewise communicated to many others, by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The time, place, occasion, and circumstances of these extraordinary transactions are frequently specified in their writings. Thus the inhabitants of many cities and countries were appealed to; and the enemies of Christianity were challenged to disprove their pretensions if they were able. But none ever attempted to do it: for the Jews themselves do not deny that many extraordinary works were performed by Jesus and his disciples: and the way in which they try to account for them, demonstrates that, from the first, their ancestors had nothing plausible to object. In this manner the witnesses and proofs of our Lord's resurrection were multiplied, in almost every part of the vast Roman empire: yea, "God also bare them witness, both with signs, and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." And can any reasonable man suppose, that a general belief could ever have prevailed, through whole nations, of such public and extraordinary events, without any person attempting to deny them; if they had not actually happened, and been so notorious as to be incontrovertible?

The chosen witnesses of our Lord's resurrection were likewise the principal penmen of the New Testament, and the whole was doubtless written under their inspection. Now in these books prophecies are inserted, which have been accomplishing ever since to the present day. A sceptic indeed might doubt, whether the predictions, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, were not penned after the event: but who can account for other parts of the same prophecy, without allowing that the writer was divinely inspired? "The people shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke xxi. 24. Has not this been actually the case with the Jews and with Jerusalem, during almost eighteen hundred years? Could human sagacity have foreseen such an unparalleled series of events? Or would God have thus confirmed the testimony of impostors? And does not this prophecy, thus wonderfully accomplished, demonstrate the resurrection of Christ, and the truth of Christianity? The coming of the man of sin, with lying miracles, doctrines of demons, worshipping of angels, prohibitions of marriage, and commands to abstain from meat; the impositions, usurpations, and persecutions of the Roman antichrist; with various other particulars, were most exactly and circumstantially predicted by the several witnesses of our Lord's resurrection: and the undeniable accomplishments of them are so many divine attestations to their testimony, for the satisfaction of all succeeding generations.

The Jewish ritual, or the pagan theology, was intimately connected with the foundations of the several governments then existing in the world: and all the learning, ingenuity, and authority on earth were engaged in their support. Yet a few unarmed, obscure, unlettered men, by preaching a crucified and risen Saviour, in the midst of persecution and sufferings, established Christianity on an immoveable basis; and their successors, following their example, so wonderfully prevailed, that at length Judaism and Paganism, fell before them; the religion of Jesus was professed by powerful nations; and, however corrupted or despised, it subsists to this day. Whatever men may insinuate concerning the ministers of religion, it is an undeniable fact, that plain preaching, fervent prayers, holy lives, and patient sufferings, were the only weapons that the primitive preachers of the gospel opposed to all the authority and learning of the world, which were resolutely employed against them: and yet they decidedly triumphed in a contest apparently so unequal. A wise man will always allow, that every effect is produced by

Digitized by Google

some adequate cause: but what adequate cause of this astonishing effect can be assigned, unless we allow that Christianity was of God, and man could not overthrow it, or prevent its success and triumph? I will only add, that every instance, which at this day occurs, of notoriously wicked persons, converted by the preaching of the gospel from their evil ways, and afterwards walking in newness of life, constitutes a proof that Christ is risen, has all power in heaven and earth, and is efficaciously present with his faithful servants, "always, even to the end of the world."

We may now I trust confidently say, that no other past event was ever proved by such an accumulated body of evidence. Who doubts whether Alexander conquered Darius, or Julius Cæsar, Pompey? Yet who can produce the tenth part of the proof in respect of these events, which hath even at this time been stated of our Lord's resurrection? But men can believe that Alexander conquered Darius, without either parting with their sins, or feeling uneasiness of conscience; while the truth of the gospel is very alarming to all that walk according to the course of the world, and neglect the salvation of Christ.

It would be difficult to find out any satisfactory method of further attesting the Redeemer's resurrection, which could have possibly been devised. For had he openly appeared to the whole Jewish people, and had they with one accord embraced Christianity; the Gentiles would naturally have considered it as a concerted plan to aggrandize the nation: and had the Jews, in their pride and prejudice, still persisted in unbelief and opposition, the gospel would have laboured under additional disadvantages in other countries, and future ages could at last have had no other human testimony, than that of the individuals whose writings should have been transmitted to them. In short, should the Lord grant the presumptuous demand of those who refuse to believe without the testimony of their own senses, and should the Saviour appear to every individual through successive generations, how could men *be sure* that this was the identical person crucified on Mount Calvary? Or how *demonstrate* that the transient vision was not an illusion? Universal uncertainty and doubt must therefore be the consequence of rejecting such unanswerable and multiplied evidences as the Lord hath mercifully vouchsafed us, of that great event which we this day commemorate.

II. We proceed to shew what inferences may be deduced from the subject before us.

It would be the grossest inconsistency, and the most absurd trifling, to contend earnestly that Christ is risen, and then overlook or deny the peculiar doctrines which his resurrection was intended to authenticate. We infer therefore from our subject, that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, "One with the Father," "God manifest in the flesh." On account of various expressions which He used in speaking of himself, he was charged with blasphemy, and of making himself *equal with God*. For this crime he was condemned by Caiaphas and the Jewish council, who said before the Roman governor, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." John xix. 7. The centurion who attended his crucifixion, could not but know for what crime he suffered: when therefore he witnessed the miracles which accompanied his death, he cried, "Truly this was the Son of God." "Certainly this was a righteous person!" When incredulous Thomas was at length convinced that Christ was risen from the dead, all that he had before heard, seen, believed, or hoped, seems at once to have rushed into his mind, and he exclaimed in adoration, "My Lord, and my God." Thus was Jesus "declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." He was demonstrated to be the promised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, Emmanuel, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, "The Lord our righteousness;" and whatever the prophets from the beginning had spoken concerning the expected glorious Re-

Digitized by Google

deemer.—All that he had spoken of himself was likewise thus fully proved to be true; it now was manifest that he was warranted to say, "I and my Father are One:" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father:" "Before Abraham was I AM:" "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me:" "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him:" "I am the Light of the world:" "I am the resurrection and the life." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink:" "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father that sent him." In short, the resurrection of Christ not only demonstrates the truth of Christianity, but the infallible certainty of all its doctrines, and authenticates the whole Scripture as *divinely inspired*. His testimony proves it in respect of the Old Testament, and the New was penned by his chosen witnesses, and attested by all the miracles they wrought in his name. So that the Lord now speaks to us, in every part of Scripture, as far as it respects our dispensation, and suits our case, with as much authority as he did to Israel from Mount Sinai, but with words of mercy and grace, instead of terror and dismay.

For if Christ be risen from the dead, then is his atonement accepted. "He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification." He was, as it were, arrested for our debt, and cast into the prison of the grave: but as full payment had been made, he was speedily liberated. 'Having overcome the sharpness of death, he hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' The foundation of our hope is now surely laid: the way of access to a throne of grace is now made manifest; for the risen Saviour is also ascended into the heavens to appear in the presence of God for us; and he is "able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him: seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The resurrection of Christ assures us, that "all power in heaven and earth are given to him;" and that "he is made Head over all things to his church." He both died, and rose again, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the living and the dead." "Angels, principalities, and powers, are made subject to him;" "he has the keys of death and hell." He is King of kings and Lord of lords:" all nature obeys him: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him: he has unsearchable riches, and invincible power: the fulness of the Spirit resides in him: "All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily." "He is become the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him:" and he must reign till all his enemies are made his footstool.—It is therefore no light matter that we are considering. "Yet," saith Jehovah, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.—Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish." Every individual must either bow to the sceptre of his grace, or be broken in pieces by the iron rod of his omnipotent indignation. 2 Thess. i. 8—10.

We are also taught that true Christians are conformed to Christ, in his death, resurrection, and ascension. By motives and grace derived from their crucified and risen Redeemer, they died to their former hopes, pleasures, and pursuits; their sensibility to temporal things is deadened; carnal self-love, the main spring of their activity in past times, is broken: "They are crucified with Christ, nevertheless they live; yet not they, but Christ liveth in them." They know him and the power of his resurrection; new principles, feelings, and actuating motives, are communicated. "They account themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God." "They live no longer to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again." "They are risen with Christ, and seek those things which are above." "Their conversation is in heaven;" and in proportion to the degree of their faith and grace, they ascend and reign with Christ, in the nature of their joys and the temper of their hearts. Thus they are prepared, whenever they leave this world, to share that fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which are at God's right hand for evermore.

Digitized by Google

As our risen Redeemer ever liveth and reigneth in heaven, to manage all the concerns of his people, and make all ready for their reception; we may adopt with exulting joy the apostle's words. "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom. v. 10. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, rather, is risen again: who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Rom. viii. 33—35. Surely our Friend, who died and rose again for us, will take care that none shall pluck us out of his hands, and will come at death to "receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also."

Finally, as Christ is risen from the dead, he "is become the first-fruits of them that slept." "The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil to the resurreetion of damnation." At that awful period, he will ascend his tribunal, finally to separate his people from his enemies: and "these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." The bodies of the wicked will be rendered incorruptible, and capable of enduring the vengeance reserved for them, "where *their* worm dieth not, and *their* fire is not quenched." Mark ix. 48—50. And those of the righteous will be raised spiritual and immortal, and fitted to participate the holy joys of heaven. "The Saviour, the Lord Jesus, shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. iii. 20, 21. In this prospect, the believer, when strong in faith, may adopt the apostle's words and say, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. We conclude with a few hints by way of application.

It may be useful, especially to young persons, to contemplate the prevailing scepticism and infidelity of the age, in connection with the subject we have been considering. God hath vouchsafed us a revelation of himself, and of his will concerning us, authenticated in the most unanswerable manner, most beneficial in its nature and tendency, and exactly suited to our circumstances: yet this revelation is opposed, reviled, or ridiculed by numbers who pretend to *virtue;* and affirm that unbelief *at most* can only be an harmless error, neither very criminal nor dangerous,—but the Scripture speaks a very different language. We read of an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Our Lord says, "How can ye believe who seek honour one of another?" "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Unbelief therefore is the offspring of ambition, love of sin, and dislike to God and holiness. It rejects the remedy which everlasting wisdom and mercy have provided for our miseries; it makes God a liar; it despises his Grace, and defies his power and justice, and is therefore inseparably connected with eternal damnation. "Let no man deceive you with vain words." Men oppose the Scripture because it opposes their favourite pursuits, and denounces an awful sentence against all who do not humbly repent, believe the gospel, and become the faithful subjects of the holy Jesus. They do not in reality need more evidence; but a more unprejudiced, teachable, and spiritual mind. "If they believe not Moses and the prophets," or the apostles and evangelists, "neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Beseech the Lord therefore to remove from you 'all hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandment;' "to open your understandings that you may understand the Scriptures;" and "to give you repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that you may recover yourselves out of the snare of the devil, who takes sinners captive at his will."

Digitized by Google

But beware also of a dead faith, which may keep men in the way of instruction, but is wholly unavailing to salvation. The faith demanded by our Lord is a living active principle; it receives him for all those purposes which he came into the world to effect; it applies to him, depends on him, and follows his directions; and "working by love," "purifying the heart," and "overcoming the world," it produces unreserved obedience to Christ, and careful imitation of his most perfect example.

The subject before us is peculiarly suited to the burdened conscience and desponding heart of those who are poor and of a contrite spirit, and tremble at God's word. Did the Son of God so love and pity proud obstinate rebels and enemies, as to give himself a sacrifice on the cross for their sins? And will he now on his glorious throne, refuse to stretch forth his powerful arm, to rescue the humble penitent, who earnestly supplicates his mercy? No, my brethren, he delights to save! Come to him, wait on him, wait in the appointed means, and you shall soon know the power of his resurrection, the depth of his condescension, and the riches of his grace.

But if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and can rejoice in having such a representative and advocate, to manage our concerns in heaven, let us remember, that we are honoured to be his representatives on earth; to shew the excellency of his religion by our example; to be useful to his redeemed people, and to promote his cause in the world. Let us then ask ourselves whether Paul, when constrained by the love of Christ, would have declined any service as too mean, laborious, self-denying, expensive, or perilous, which the command and honour of his Lord called him to perform? And whether he would not have more fully improved even *our* talents and advantages than we have hitherto done? Let us review our conduct, and consider what ability or opportunity we have of honouring Christ among men: let us reflect on our obligations and prospects, and see to it, that our lights be burning, and our loins girded, that when he cometh we may be found watching, and employed in a proper manner. And may the God of peace, "who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will; working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON XX.

PREACHED ON WHITSUNDAY, 1795.

ON THE AGENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

ISAIAH, XXXII. 15.

Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.

In the beginning of this chapter, the evangelical prophet foretels the auspicious advent, and benign government of the Messiah; perhaps with some reference to Hezekiah's equitable and prosperous reign over Judah. He then denounces sentence on the careless, obstinate, and unbelieving Jews, in language aptly descriptive of their condition, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: and then he declares, that these desolations would endure, "until the Spirit were poured upon them from on high;" the happy effects of which gracious dispensation he predicts in the most energetic language. This seems to be the prophetical meaning of the chap-

Digitized by Google

ter, the concluding verses of which have not hitherto received their accomplishment.—But the present occasion fixes our attention to the words of the text, and I shall endeavour from them,

I. To explain what is meant by the pouring "out of the Spirit from on high."

II. To consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

III. To make some remarks on the emphatical word, "Until."

IV. To point out some instructions more immediately arising from the subject.

I. I would explain the words here used.

The apostle calls Christianity "the ministration of the Spirit." 2 Cor. iii. 8. And it is certain, however it may be overlooked, that the promise of the Spirit pervades the New Testament, in the same manner as that of a Messiah does the old. The language used concerning this subject evidently implies the *personality* and *deity* of the Holy Spirit. He is represented as *hearing, speaking, willing, commanding, forbidding, receiving,* and *executing a commission:* and this not in allegories and parables, but in histories, didactic discussions, laws, and grants, where precision is indispensably necessary, and a literal interpretation peculiarly suitable; and without doubt these are *personal* actions. At the same time divine perfections and operations are ascribed to him. He is said to dwell in the hearts of all believers, as in his temple, to search the deep things of God, to raise the dead, and to effect a new creation. He is called the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of power, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, the eternal Spirit, and the Comforter. If then the Holy Spirit be a person possessing divine perfections, and performing divine operations; and if the same be true of the Father, and of the Son also, the ancient doctrine of the Trinity is evidently Scriptural, though we can neither explain or comprehend so deep a mystery.

If we further examine the subject, we shall find, that the Scriptures uniformly ascribe all miraculous powers, prophecy, and inspiration, to the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit; so that the wonderful works of Christ himself, and the exercise of his mediatorial offices on earth, are spoken of as performed by his anointing; "the Holy Ghost was not given by measure unto him;" John iii. 34. Acts i. 2. x. 38. and St Paul particularly describes the diversity of gifts communicated by the same Spirit, "dividing to every man severally as he willed." 1 Cor. xii. The predictions of the prophets concerning the pouring out of the Spirit in the days of the Messiah, Isaiah xliv. 3. Joel ii. 28. as well as our Lord's promises to his disciples, may have a special reference to these extraordinary gifts and powers; and to that display of the ascended Redeemer's glory and majesty, which was made on the day of Pentecost; but it should also be noted, that effects were produced, at that important season, by the same divine agent, which were far more valuable to those by whom they were experienced.

If we accurately study the language of the Sacred Oracles, we shall be convinced that the Holy Spirit is there spoken of, as the immediate Author of all that is holy and excellent in man: and that spiritual death, and a total incapacity of delighting in God and heavenly things, universally prevails in the human heart; till "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death." "Except a man be born again—born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see—he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He is "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God, to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, that we may know the hope of our calling." Eph. i. 17, 18. He "convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment:" he glorifies Christ, for he receives of his, and shews it unto us." It is his office to "teach us all things, and lead us into

Digitized by Google

all truth."—Christians are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit to obedience:" they "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." "They pray, *in* and *by* the Holy Ghost, who helps their infirmities:" "they are led by the Spirit," and all their holy tempers and actions are "the fruits of the Spirit." So that, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his:" for all his redeemed people are "sealed by the Spirit who is the earnest of their inheritance:" as "the Spirit of adoption, he witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God;" and thus he becomes their all-sufficient comforter; "for the kingdom of God is—in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

In these respects we are warranted to expect the pouring out of the Spirit on our souls and congregations: and we are confident that all true Christians are "the temple of the Holy Ghost, an habitation of God through the Spirit:" and we are amazed that any man, who calls himself a disciple of Christ should be so ignorant as to deny this fundamental truth of the gospel, or so profane as to turn it into a ridicule! "If ye," says our Lord, "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" This accords to the promise of the Lord by his prophet, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgements and do them." Luke xi. 13. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

We presume not to effect equality with prophets and apostles: we expect no new revelations; for the Scriptures soberly interpreted are the standard of truth. But we profess, to depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us properly to understand them: and if we hold any thing contrary to the word of God, we deceive ourselves, if we suppose it to be derived from the teaching of the Spirit. We have no other rule of duty, but the commandments of God; but we need the promised teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to understand this rule, to convince us of our manifold deviations from it, to humble and soften our hearts in true repentance, to encourage our hope of mercy, and help us to apply for it, and to strengthen us for renewed obedience. We do not pretend to know that our sins are pardoned; except as we are conscious that we hate and abhor them, and humbly trust in Christ to deliver us from them. We infer our interest in the love of God as our heavenly Father, from our love to him as his adopted children, and from an habitual desire of living to his glory, obeying his commandments, and doing good to our brethren for his sake.

Surely no man, who professes to reverence the Scriptures, will call this enthusiasm! We disclaim all pretensions to predict future events, or to discover things unknown to others by any immediate revelation from God: yea, we protest against them as derogatory to the Holy Scriptures, and a disgrace to the gospel; and even the incautious language of some well-meaning persons, meets with decided disapprobation from others, who hold most of the same doctrines; because it is capable of being perverted or misunderstood.

These remarks having been premised, I observe, that as all spiritual religion is produced by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and every degree of success attending the gospel of Christ must be ascribed to a few drops, as it were, of this fertilizing rain; so there are seasons, in which the Spirit is *poured* from on high in copious showers, upon some favoured spots of the Lord's vineyard. This was most remarkably the case on the day of Pentecost, and for a considerable time afterwards; and though the effects were gradually diminished, yet neither the communication of miraculous gifts, nor the abundant converting and sanctifying influences accompanying the preaching of the gospel, ceased, till perhaps more than two centuries afterwards.—Such an out-pouring of the Spirit attended the labours of the reformers, in the time of Luther, and for many years after his death. Nor has our land been left wholly destitute of this special benefit during the present century; and

Digitized by Google

some places seem yet to be favoured with it in a considerable degree. In short, they who are conversant with the records of the church, ancient or modern, will recollect various seasons, when, in different places, the Spirit of God was poured upon his people from on high; and all these should be considered as earnests of more abundant blessings, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought into the church: and the Jews "shall look to him whom they have pierced," uniting penitent tears with believing supplications. Zech. xii. 10—14.

II. We proceed to consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

In order to elucidate the subject, we must advert to the present state of the church and of the world. If we look among the constituted ministers of religion, we cannot but perceive, that vast numbers consider their profession, in great measure, as a secular employment, and pursue their worldly interests by it, like other orders in the community, without any proportionable earnestness in seeking the salvation of souls, and the advancement of genuine Christianity. Many indeed are very learned and ingenious; but alas, they embrace and contend for doctrines, which certainly were deduced from a very different source, than the Sacred Scriptures. Others preach several of the great truths of the gospel; but seem little concerned to apply them to the hearts and consciences of mankind; or to excite them, by fervent exhortations and a bright example, to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." A few indeed appear to be honestly and simply engaged in the most useful work of their sacred function: yet perhaps the skilfulness, boldness, self-denial, diligence, zeal, and faithfulness, even of this remnant, fall much beneath the degree which men "of like passions" have at more favoured seasons been known to display.

These things should not be considered as a censure of modern times; for the case has been nearly the same in almost every age and part of the church. No external appointment to the ministry, no engagement, or mode of worship, can by its own efficacy dethrone the selfishness of the human heart, or induce the carnally-minded to act from pure motives, and to delight in the spiritual service of the Redeemer. But when "the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high;" we may expect, that such ministers as have feebly sought the glory of God in the salvation of souls, will feel their hearts enlarged with more abundant zeal and love; and that a vast accession will be made to their wisdom and knowledge of Christ and his holy doctrine. They will probably be to a great degree delivered from the fear of men,—raised above the love of the world,—emancipated from a bigotted regard to systems and parties,—filled with melting compassion to perishing sinners, and tender love to their brethren; occupied with realizing views of eternal things, prepared for perilous and self-denying services, and disposed cordially to unite with their fellow-labourers in promoting the common cause; without regard to competition, personal interest, or reputation.

Those who have preached the truths of the gospel, without application or animation, will then probably feel and insist upon their practical tendency, and manifest it in their own conduct. Some, who have been adverse to the truth, may be won over to preach the faith which once they opposed; loiterers and hirelings may be converted into faithful, diligent, able, and disinterested pastors; many labourers will be sent forth into the vineyard; and every one who partakes of these fertilizing showers, will "take heed to the ministry which he hath received of the Lord, that he fulfil it."

The change which took place, even in the apostles themselves, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, with the conduct of the primitive ministers of the gospel, and the exhortations addressed to them in the New Testament, abundantly warrant these expectations.

If next we survey the mass of people called Christians, and observe their disposition and conduct, we shall readily understand what effects would be

Digitized by Google

produced by the pouring out of the Spirit upon us. Let us, for instance, consider the inhabitants of this city, and their behaviour in respect of the Lord's day, the public worship, and the preaching of the gospel. We shall in this review see cause to lament, that vast multitudes retire into the country for irreligious recreation, or employ the holy Sabbath in travelling; that crowds assemble in places of intemperate indulgence, or frivolous amusement; and that many spend part of the day in adjusting some worldly business, and the residue in sloth or festivity. A few, compared with the whole immense number, attend at the several places of public worship; the majority of whom, it is to be feared, having paid their weekly tribute, think no more about it; being "as a man who dreameth that he eateth, but he awaketh and his soul is empty." Others frequent the places where the word of God is preached, with considerable regularity, but continue hearers only, and not doers. In short, few comparatively seem to receive the "gospel, not as the word of man, but as—the word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe;" or to worship the Lord in spirit and truth; and even these see cause to lament their want of zeal and fervency, and too often manifest a languor and a defect in earnestness and activity, where the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind, are concerned.

But if "the Spirit were poured upon us from on high," the hearts of such persons would expand with holy affections, and be filled with divine consolations. They would become fervent in every religious duty, and earnest in prayer for their ministers and brethren, and for a blessing on every attempt to propagate the gospel; they would bestow pains to impress the instructions of Scripture on the minds of their children, relatives, and servants; to recommend the truth by their example, and to enforce it in their conversation: They would say to those, with whom they had any influence, "Come ye, and let us go to the house of God, and he will teach us of his way, and we will walk in his paths." Isaiah ii. 3. And as Andrew brought Peter, and Philip, Nathanael, to an acquaintance with Christ, they would endeavour, by letters, books, and all other means in their power, to lead such as had been strangers to the gospel, to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and into the way of life and salvation.

At such a season, formal worshippers would find their hearts engaged in a new manner to attend on the ordinances of God, and many of them would become true believers. Those, who had imbibed false doctrines, would perceive that God was of a truth present in our congregations, and be induced to join themselves to us; a general attention and inquiry would be raised; and "the Lord would daily add unto the church such as should be saved."

In this manner it hath frequently been known, that great multitudes, through large districts, have in a short time been brought to consider their ways; the veil, that hides God and eternal things from men's minds, hath been apparently rent; and more hath been done, in bringing men to receive the gospel, and to walk in newness of life, during a few months, than the very same ministers had been able to accomplish in the course of many preceding years. These effects are also proved to be genuine, by their permanency, and by the holy lives of numbers, after the first vehement affections, and the remarkable circumstances of such revivals, have ceased. Thus the thousands that were converted, when the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship," they "were of one heart," they "had all things in common," and "great grace was upon them all." But when a religious commotion arises from enthusiasm, false principles, and selfish affections, it often leaves men more immoral and ungodly than they were before.

Again, if we consider the more pious part of our congregations, how often have we reason to lament that there is *no more* union and affection among them? And that they are kept at so great a distance from each other, by their stations in life, their different employments, talents, and dispositions, or even by trivial resentments, suspicions, and prejudices? But the bless-

Digitized by Google

ing of which we speak would deliver Christians from such contracted and selfish passions; and they would be ready, without hesitation, cordially to forgive all who had offended them,—to make concessions and amends to those whom they had injured,—and to seek reconciliation with every one who had been in any respect alienated from them. An increase of divine illumination and brotherly love would terminate or moderate our differences of opinion; men would less regard the trivial disparity of outward rank, except as it reminded them of their several duties; they would readily unite in social worship and profitable conversation; and in proportion as these sacred influences rested on their souls, they would abound in self-denying beneficence, and in active endeavours to supply the wants of the indigent,—to soothe the anguish of the afflicted,—and to alleviate the miseries of mankind. An attentive meditation on the apostolical exhortations, and the conduct of the primitive Christians, may suffice to convince us, that these must be the effects of the pouring out of the Spirit upon any congregation, city, or country; for indeed, "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance."

Should we advert to the state of religion more at large, we should find, that the remnant, which professes the leading truths of Christianity, and appears to be influenced by them, is lamentably divided into parties, about subordinate points of doctrine, or matters of discipline and government. So that, if we could collect together the whole company of real believers, we should find them very discordant in their sentiments, and disposed to magnify the importance of their several particularities; and it would be extremely difficult, if not wholly impossible, to unite them in religious services, or in the same plan for promoting the common cause. On the contrary, it would hardly be practicable to exclude subjects of doubtful disputation, or to prevent such contests and mutual censures as only serve to furnish the enemies of the gospel with plausible objections! Alas, this is an evident proof, that, as the apostle expresses it, we *are yet carnal*, (1 Cor. iii. 3, 4,) however orthodox our creed may be, or how zealously soever we contend for it. "Hereby," says our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another."

But when "the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high," all "who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," will "love one another with a pure heart fervently." The pride and selfish passions, which occasion disputes, will be mortified; the minds of Christians will be more fully illuminated; the harmony of Scripture will be better understood; the comparative value of every part of religion will be more clearly ascertained; and men will be rendered more humbly sensible of their fallibility, and more eminent in candour and patience. Thus, while a most desirable progress will be made, in regulating every thing according to the standard of truth; Christians will be cured, in great measure, of their propensity to judge or despise their brethren; and will learn to "receive one another, even as Christ receiveth them to the glory of God." The pouring out of the Spirit will effect, what acts of uniformity, conciliatory schemes, or philosophical candour can never accomplish; for it will bring Christians, through whole countries, "with one mind, and one mouth, to glorify God:" to form one church, professing the same fundamental doctrines; harmoniously joining in the same worship, and the celebration of the same ordinances; and zealously concurring to promote the conversion of Mahometans, Jews, and Pagans, to Scriptural Christianity.

These happy effects are predicted by the prophets, under various significant representations; of which it may suffice at present to produce a single specimen. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy

Digitized by Google

in all my holy mountain ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Isaiah xi. 6—9. xli. 18—20. xliv. 3—5.

These are some of the effects which will proportionably follow, whenever the Spirit is poured out upon the church. Many others might be mentioned, did brevity permit ; and some of them will come in our way, in the subsequent part of the subject.

III. Then we proceed to make some remarks on the emphatical word, "Until."

A variety of plans are continually proposed and adopted, to meliorate the condition of mankind, and to guard at the same time against tyranny in the rulers, and the turbulency of the multitude. No doubt something may be done in this way to render the state of the world more tolerable, than it would otherwise be: for, while civil government in general is *God's ordinance*, the peculiar arrangement of it is left in great measure to human prudence ; and it may therefore be also called *the ordinance of man*. Rom. xiii. 2. 1 Peter ii. 13. But too sanguine expectations are formed, when changes take place, or when supposed improvements are made ; and speedy disappointment is the consequence. The world after all remains full of oppression or sedition: the rulers and the people generally continue the same in disposition, whatever external changes take place: and selfishness produces its effects, after all the efforts which are made to counteract it ; even as poison retains its destructive efficacy, in whatever form it is administered. This will in great measure continue to be the case, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, to renew men's hearts to the divine image of love : and then, they will delight in equity, goodness, mercy, and peace, after the example of our Holy God! which will render human society as happy, as it is now too often miserable.

Again, the earth hath in every age been a field of blood ; and the vast proportion of our race, which has perished by the sword, almost exceeds credibility or calculation : nor can the compassionate mind reflect on the subject without horror and amazement. The causes of this deplorable fact have been sought for, in the different forms of government ; and the ambition of men distinguished by certain titles, or invested with authority in some peculiar manner. Yet the disposition to delight in war seems to have been common to governors of all descriptions : and the sacred writers, characterizing the ungodly, say, "their feet are swift to shed blood." Universal history is the best comment on this text ; all the genius of mankind, however diversified, has combined to celebrate successful warriors. The original murderer has appeared in this respect especially to be the god of this world: Mars, Bellona, and even Minerva, (the poet's emblem of prudence in war,) were the names under which polite nations have worshipped him ; and unnumbered millions of human victims have been immolated at his shrine by his renowned priests, who have emulated his ambition and malignity, and shared the adoration which he received. Thus it will be in great measure, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." Ambition, resentment, rapacity, and interfering interests will continue to excite mankind to war : and both the mighty and the mean, will in general, deem this one of the most honourable and desirable of employments ; till those happy times arrive, which are predicted in the Scriptures, when "the nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks : and they shall learn war no more." But every degree of that sacred influence will in the mean while, produce proportionably the same happy consequences.

It is likewise grievous to reflect on the severities which are necessary to maintain peace and order in the community;—On the numbers deprived of life, immured in dungeons, and banished to remote and desolate regions, that others may live in security. While the silent ravages of licentiousness appear even still more dreadful, to those who have the opportunity, or are under the painful necessity of investigating them! The wisdom and assiduity of

Digitized by Google

men are well employed, in attempting to abate these dire mischiefs: but no effectual remedy will be applied, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." Then the divine law will be written in men's hearts; and justice, benevolence, and universal temperance, implanted in the soul, will infallibly rectify these disorders, which are incurable by all other means.

We cannot reflect on the condition in which the nations remain to this day, without lamenting, that so large a proportion of the earth is still covered with Pagan darkness, Mahometan delusion, or Jewish incredulity. The ignorance, superstition, and wickedness, of nominal Christians; the prevalence of anti-scriptural tenets even in the Protestant churches; and the rapid progress of impiety, infidelity, and atheism, present a very gloomy prospect to the mind of a true believer. And when we consider the immense difficulties of remedying these evils, and the inadequate effects of the most laudable efforts, we are ready to sit down in despair. We should however remember, that every degree of success far more than counterbalances the expence or labour of our exertions: and that we must not expect to make very rapid progress, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high."—But then mountains will flow down at the presence of the Lord; nations will be born in a day; a new creation will prepare men's hearts to welcome the gospel: all other difficulties will vanish or be surmounted: and "the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The various abuses, divisions, scandals, and false doctrines, which prevail among such as shew more regard to Scriptural Christianity, will not be counteracted; nor will that revival of the power of godliness in our congregations, which every friend of evangelical truth must ardently desire, be effectually introduced, "till the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." So that this is the grand *desideratum;* the only adequate remedy for all the evils we witness or hear of, in the church and in the world. Till our prayers in this respect be answered, we shall see on every side most lamentable disorders, which we cannot rectify; and few in comparison will be found, who have ability or zeal for making such arduous attempts: but this expected event will raise up and qualify instruments for every kind of service; dispose the minds of multitudes cordially to unite in vigorous exertions; and render their endeavours rapidly and extensively successful.

IV. Then I proceed to point out some instructions, more immediately arising from the subject.

How ignorant must they be, as to the very first principles of Christianity, who treat our professed dependence on the Holy Spirit, and experience of his sacred influences, with supercilious contempt! A Jew of old, would not have been more profanely absurd, in ridiculing the expectation of a Messiah as fanaticism! Even if uninspired men could, by their superior talents, improve upon the oracles of God, (as some of them seem arrogantly disposed to think,) this would no more supercede the necessity of divine influences, than modern improvements in agriculture render the fertilizing showers and the genial warmth of the sun unnecessary. Even the preaching of Him, "who spake as never man spake," was rendered effectual by the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit; without which, Paul would have planted, and Apollos watered in vain. No wonder then, than such teachers as deny, deride, explain away, or even keep out of sight, the promised influences of the Holy Spirit, harrangue the people in weekly lectures, from year to year, without witnessing or even expecting any great effect. While men depend on their own rationality, ingenuity, or eloquence, and dishonour the divine Spirit, we may be sure that the Lord will frown upon the presumptuous attempt, and blast all their vain endeavours. Indeed no man is warranted to expect success, even in preaching the pure gospel of Christ, except as he simply relies on the Holy Spirit to assist and prosper his labours, uses the proper means of obtaining his powerful co-operation, and explicitly gives him all the glory.

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." Unless,

Digitized by Google

therefore, we possess some evidence in our own hearts, that we are the temples of the Holy Ghost, we cannot, without manifest presumption, expect that the Judge of the world will, at the last day, own us as his true disciples: but this cannot be known to us, except by the effects produced on our views, dispositions, affections, and conduct. Humiliation for sin, faith, love of Christ and his people, compassion for sinners, a spiritual mind, and an habitual aim to glorify God and do good to men, are the genuine effects produced by the Spirit of God dwelling in us. Can it be rational to overlook those Scriptures which speak on these subjects? or to expect the eternal felicity promised to Christians, while destitute of those things which are declared essential to Christianity?

Again, would we prosper in our own souls, or succeed in endeavouring to do good in our families, connections, and situations, we must adhere to the doctrines and precepts of Scripture; pray with fervent importunity for the influences of the Spirit, and be very careful not to grieve him, or to quench that sacred fire which he kindles in the believing heart. If we have hitherto been remarkably unsuccessful, we should seriously inquire, on what account the Lord contends with us? And especially we should examine, whether we have not depended on our own supposed abilities, or sought our own honour, instead of relying simply on the Holy Spirit, with a readiness of mind to ascribe to him all the glory of every successful attempt.

They, who would enjoy the benefit of an able and faithful ministry, should be instant in prayer for their pastors. If this were more attended to, we should doubtless be enabled to 'set forth the true and lively word of God, both by our preaching and living,' with far greater effect; and should be in all respects much more useful. But our fervent supplications should not be confined to those with whom we are more immediately connected; for we ought to pray continually for the "pouring out of the Spirit from on high," upon every part of the visible church, and upon all orders and descriptions of men throughout the world. This should constitute a *prominent* part of our daily prayers, in our closets and families; and enter particularly into the various circumstances in which mankind are placed. We ought to entreat the Lord to render all his ministers faithful, holy, and successful; to send forth labourers into his harvest; to unite all Christians in the bonds of brotherly love; to prosper all means used for the conversion of Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, or infidels; and to "fill the earth with truth and righteousness."

We shall not probably live to witness this glorious scene: yet the Lord may bless some means which we use, in making way for that grand triumph of his cause. Thus David zealously prepared materials for the temple, though assured it would not be builded in his days. If we have little else in our power, either to serve our generation, or to sow seed for the good of posterity; we may perform an important service by our persevering prayers; and whenever the Lord shall "pour out his Spirit from on high," to make his gospel victorious over all opposition; his people will certainly go forth to meet him with their united fervent supplications.

Digitized by Google

SERMON XXI.

ON A CONVERSATION BECOMING THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS, 1. 27.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ.

ST Paul wrote this epistle, as well as some others, from his prison at Rome. and it is manifest that the Lord was with him, as he had been with Joseph in similar circumstances; which rendered his confinement unspeakably more pleasant, than a splendid palace with a guilty conscience and ungovernable passions. Instead of dejection, murmurs, or resentment, we find the apostle uniformly employing the language of cheerfulness, confidence, and exultation. He declares, that "to him to live was Christ, and to die gain." All his credit, interest, business, and pleasure in life, consisted in communion with Christ, and earnest endeavours to glorify him and promote his cause; and he was sure that death, in whatever form it should arrest him, would prove his richest advantage! What a blessed religion is this, which can turn the king of terrors into a kind friend, and the loss of all terrestrial things into the most valuable of acquisitions? What, my brethren, can wealth, reputation, authority, genius, or philosophy propose, which is comparable to this? Why then should you hesitate to sell all, and purchase the pearl of great price?

But though the apostle had a longing "desire to depart and be with Christ, as far better;" yet he was willing to continue on earth, "for the furtherance and joy of faith" of his beloved people.—As if a pardoned rebel should voluntarily submit to the inconveniencies and sufferings of a dungeon, in order to recommend the clemency of his prince to other criminals; or be helpful to those, who having likewise received mercy, were for some reason retained a while longer in confinement.

Hence he took occasion to exhort the Philippians in the following words, "Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, and in nothing terrified by your adversaries."—From the part of this exhortation contained in our text, I shall endeavour,

I. To give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

II. To shew that this gospel, when rightly understood, and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

III. To mention some leading particulars in which "a conversation becoming the gospel" more especially consists.

IV. To make some remarks on the emphatical word "Only."

I. I would attempt to give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

We know that the word rendered *gospel* signifies *glad tidings*; and a preacher of the gospel is a messenger or herald, bringing and publishing good news. "How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things?" Isaiah lii. 7. Rom. x. 15.

The Ephesians, when they had formed the design of building the celebrated temple of Diana, were at a loss where to procure a sufficient quantity of the finest marble, to accomplish the plan; and it is recorded, that a certain per-

Digitized by Google

son in this emergency, found a quarry at no great distance, exactly suited to the purpose. Running therefore without delay to inform the citizens of this fortunate event, he was saluted and afterwards called, *Evangelus, or the bringer of good tidings;* a name of exactly the same import, with that rendered a preacher of the gospel, or an evangelist. But though his tidings were infinitely less important and joyful than ours; it may be questioned, whether any whole city ever thus gladly welcomed the message of salvation; and we know that in general it meets with a very different reception!

Good tidings often derive a great part of their value, from their suitableness to the case of those who hear them. The promulgation of good laws, and the impartial adminstration of justice, though valuable blessings in themselves, can give no pleasure to condemned malefactors: but a report of the king's clemency, or an assurance of a pardon would suit their case, and tend to cheer their drooping hearts. An act of grace is glad tidings to confined debtors; though it may give umbrage to their creditors; and the arrival of a fleet with provisions, in a time of urgent famine, occasions a joy, of which such as live in plenty can form no adequate conception. We must therefore understand something of our own condition, before we can cordially welcome the gospel of Christ; and inattention or mistake, in this respect forms one grand reason, why so many slight the message of salvation. But lectures on moral duties separated from the doctrines of grace, no more meet the case of lost sinners, than an extract from the statutes of the realm can give comfort and hope to condemned criminals.

We may know something of our situation by facts; and the Scripture further explains the humiliating and alarming subject. It cannot be denied, that the world is full of crimes and miseries; this is equally certain, whether men believe or disbelieve the Bible. Even they who are averse to the doctrine of human depravity, when applied to themselves and their connections; shew by the caution with which they transact their affairs, that they consider mankind in general as basely selfish: and he who at first disdains this sentiment, as unjust and illiberal, will be at length constrained to adopt it, or become a prey to designing men. Hence it is, that incautious young persons, having been repeatedly deceived, often grow suspicious and peevish as they advance in years; and, when this is the case, they give vent to their vexation by reviling this or the other description of men. As if the fault lay in their rank or profession, and were not common to the human species, however restrained, disguised, or modified, except as true religion produces an effectual change of disposition.

At the same time, it is evident, that all our comforts are entwined with cares and disquietudes; every enjoyment, after a while, palls and grows insipid: all our possessions are precarious, and may either be torn from us, or become the causes of the most exquisite anguish. Pain and sickness are entailed upon us; death is certain, and who knows how near? Its approach is dreadful, its stroke inevitable, and its *visible* effects intolerably mortifying. A dark gloom overshadows the rest: who but he that believes the sure testimony of God, can say, what is beyond the grave? Yet there are forebodings of future retribution, which most men experience to their additional alarm; so that numbers seem to suffer many deaths in fearing one! To escape such distressing reflections, they who are not confined by daily business, have recourse to some species of dissipation. These at first yield a childish delight; but soon become irksome, unless novelty be superadded by unceasing variety. This is the real secret of public and private diversions; and of the liberality with which immense sums are expended, in encouraging new species of amusement, however frivolous and absurd! These enable men, for a moment, to escape from the tediousness of life, or the anguish of solitude and reflection; and tend to promote forgetfulness of God, of death, and of a judgement to come.

We appeal to every man's feelings and observation, whether this description does not accord with facts? and whether it have any dependence on re-

Digitized by Google

ligious opinions, except as men are seldom able wholly to disbelieve a God and a future state? Let us then inquire what light the Scriptures throw upon the subject. There we learn, that "God made man in his own image," and created the world "very good:" but that the first parents of our race ungratefully rebelled against their bountiful Creator, and disobeyed his express and easy command. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, in that all have sinned." Thenceforth the human race became subject to labours, pains, afflictions, and diseases, until "they return to the dust, whence they were taken." The holy image of God was also effaced, and men became incapable of spiritual felicity, dead in sin, and prone to every kind of evil.

When the *root* of our race thus fell, all the branches must share his doom, and become mortal and sinful: And as "it is appointed to all men once to die, and after death the judgement;" still more terrible miseries may justly be dreaded in a future world. A criminal may suffer many things previous to his trial and condemnation, but his principal punishment follows afterwards. And as the human soul is subject to sinful passions, corresponding to the diseases of the body, we must inevitably be exposed to condemnation at the tribunal of God, and we also carry in our lapsed nature the seeds of misery and destruction.

But our pride and self-love start a thousand objections to these doctrines; though the difficulty of reconciling *facts* with our notions and reasonings unavoidably recoils upon us. We have, however, another view given us, in the sacred oracles, of our actual condition, still more suited "to stop every mouth, and to bring in all the world guilty before God."—We are doubtless, as reasonable creatures, accountable to our supreme Governor and Judge, for every part of our conduct; and his holy law is the rule, by which every disposition, word, and action must be tried. Now, without entering further on the subject, who does not feel, that he hath in many instances violated the reasonable and righteous commandments of God? Who hath not heard that "cursed is every one that *continueth not in all things* written in the book of the law to do them?"

Thus "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin:" and it was not without *cause*, I hope not without *meaning*, that we this morning added after each of the commandments, 'Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.'

The man, who carefully compares his past and present conduct, with this most strict and spiritual standard, will soon find his own conscience bring in a verdict against him: "And if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." No repentance or amendment can compensate for past offences: because we cannot in any instance exceed our present duty; and our debt increases in proportion as we still fall short of perfect obedience. Nor can we estimate the intrinsic evil of our sins against the infinite majesty of heaven, or the punishment we deserve for our ungrateful rebellion.

When we attempt to frame our conduct by the holy law of God, we feel a wonderful reluctance and backwardness to this most reasonable service, and a strong propensity to disobedience. These evil dispositions, though common to all, are in some exceedingly strengthened by habit, and rendered ungovernable by peculiar temptations. Such men therefore, as have some serious thoughts and form good purposes, commonly find their resolutions enervated, and their endeavours baffled; and after some fruitless efforts, they return to their former course of life, unless relieved by the gospel of Christ.

When these things are seriously considered, the condition of mankind appears truly deplorable. Related to God and an eternal world; exposed to death and a future judgment; already guilty of many heinous crimes, and propense to increase the number; liable to final condemnation, and vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: what can any one do, to rescue or ransom himself or his brother, from the awful sentence already published by the

Digitized by Google

Judge, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" It is in vain to reason and dispute against facts, and the sure testimony of Scripture: "Who art thou, that repliest against God? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" Job iv. 17.

Let us rather submit to his righteousness, and seek that relief which his gospel proposes to us. The Lord, against whom we have rebelled, hath revealed himself to us, as "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin:" and hath made way for the exercise of his boundless mercy, in harmony with infinite justice and holiness, in the person, redemption, and mediation of his beloved Son. And the divine Saviour, having made a complete atonement for sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, and triumphed over all our enemies, now reigneth Lord of all worlds, and is "able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him; seeing, he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The proposal of mercy and grace, without money and without price, to the chief of sinners; the pressing invitations and persuasions with which God doth by his ministers beseech us to be reconciled to him; the actual pardon and complete justification of every true believer; the gift of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify our souls; the exceeding great and precious promises, privileges, and engagements of the new covenant; and the present comfort and future inheritance of the Lord's adopted children, might be particularly insisted on, in discussing the subject. These are in all respects good news, glad tidings, most needful for us, suited to our case, sufficient for our happiness, springing from love unspeakable, and terminating in the everlasting salvation and glory of all, who obtain an interest in them. This is the gospel of Christ; the most rejoicing report that ever reached the ears of mortal man! Little indeed has been said on such a subject; yea that little may serve to introduce an attempt,

II. To shew, that this gospel, when rightly understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

This will appear, if we consider the information which it affords us, on the most interesting subjects connected with our judgement and practice. "That God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." The discoveries made to us in the gospel, concerning the mysteries of the Godhead, and the harmonions perfections of the divine character, are suited to excite our highest admiration, adoration, and love; and to make us exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" This directly influences our judgement and affections, which are as the regulator and main-spring of all our words and actions: and hence we must perceive, that God is worthy of all possible love, worship, confidence, and obedience; that happiness consists in his favour, that his image is beauty and excellency, and his service perfect freedom.

The views which the gospel of Christ gives us of the holy law of God, as worthy to be honoured, both in its requirements and sanctions, by the obedience and atoning sacrifice of Him, whom all angels worship, is suited to impress our minds with the deepest sense of its excellency and authority. The clear revelation of an eternal state of righteous retributions, and of the unmingled happiness or misery which succeeds this present life, is sufficient, when truly believed, to swallow up all our anxiety about this vanishing scene; and to make the eager pursuits of worldly men appear as frivolous as the sports of children, or as infatuated as the intoxicated mirth of condemned criminals.

The gospel of Christ shews us also the *evil* of sin in the most affecting light. "We know that the judgement of God is according to truth:" and here we especially learn his judgment on this disputed subject. The language of the gospel is that of infinite and everlasting love and mercy; it declares sin to

Digitized by Google

be so enormous and malignant an evil, that rather than leave it unpunished, "God spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all." How can an enlightened believer look to the cross, without mourning for his sins, abhorring them as the murderers of Christ his Lord, and earnestly longing for the destruction of every evil propensity in his heart and nature?

Various other subjects might be mentioned, but they frequently call for our attention. The worth of an immortal soul, the ruined state of mankind, the vanity of worldly prosperity, and many similar instructions, emphatically conveyed to us by the gospel of Christ, are exactly suited to form the believer to a holy and heavenly temper and conversation.

The knowledge of our duty, and of the divine authority by which it is enjoined us, is not sufficient for practical purposes, in the present state of human nature: our affections must also be influenced by such powerful motives, as may preponderate against all that can be cast into the opposite scale.—But *proximity* gives earthly things an immense advantage. As objects appear large when near, but seem to diminish when removed to a distance; so *present* things are considered as important beyond all proportion; while things *future*, though immensely more valuable, are thought to be of little consequence, and scarcely possess any influence over the minds of men in general. But *faith*, like a telescope, brings objects invisible to unbelievers near to the soul; and enables us to contemplate, as *real* and of infinite magnitude, those things which other men consider as doubtful, remote, and uninteresting: while the Holy Spirit, producing in us a new and heavenly nature, makes us capable of perceiving the glory, and relishing the excellency of spiritual blessings. Thus they obtain the ascendency in our judgment and choice, we become spiritually minded, and savour the things which are of God; bonds which fastened our hearts to earthly objects are broken; the balance turns the other way; and we set our "affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

"Fear not," says our Lord to his disciples, "fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."—When the gospel is really understood and believed, we "fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into heavenly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;" and this apprehension prevails over our dread of labour, reproach, scorn, self-denial, or persecution: yea, the fear of divine chastening, of grieving the Spirit, of a wounded conscience, or of dishonouring the doctrine of Christ, is a powerful motive to watchfulness and prayer. The desire of everlasting felicity in the favour of God, and of the present consolations found in communion with him, subordinate our hungerings and thirstings after earthly objects. A kingdom that cannot be moved; glory, honour and immortality; treasures in heaven that fail not, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore, are blessings commensurate with our largest wishes and capacities, and durable as our immortal souls; and the lively hope of this incorruptible inheritance, grounded on the sure word of God, and sealed by his sanctifying Spirit, is capable of triumphing over all our expectation of temporal advantages, distinctions, and gratifications; and of animating the soul to patient continuance in well-doing. Love to our God and Saviour, likewise, unites its powerful influences: and while we cleave to him with fervent desires, rejoice in him with admiring gratitude, and are fervently zealous for the honour of his name; we shall feel constrained by his supreme affection "to live no longer to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again." Thus we shall be prepared to venture, suffer, and labour, in seeking to glorify his name and recommend his precious salvation.

The encouragements of the gospel also are very efficacious. The sinner who attempts to amend his life, according to the word of God, is very liable to grow weary in his attempts. The law seems to say to him, "Pay me that thou owest;" and he feels as if he were further and further removed from the righteousness he went about to establish, and that victory over his pas-

Digitized by Google

sions which he expected speedily to accomplish. On the other hand, if he make the principles of morality, or some *mitigated law* his standard, he is at a loss to determine how much obedience will entitle him to acceptance, and uncertainty tends to discouragement. For the diligent and conscientious are in this case always harassed with doubts; and none but the heedless and self-confident think themselves *good enough* to be the objects of the divine favour.

But the gospel of Christ invites all that are athirst to come to him, and he will give them of the fountain of the water of life freely: and assures the trembling sinner, that "him, who cometh to the Saviour, he will in *no wise cast out.*" It runs in this gracious tenor, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth." As therefore every blessing is freely given, for Christ's sake, to the poor supplicant however unworthy; nothing but pride, unbelief, contempt of heavenly things, aversion to God and religion, or idolatrous love of the world, can exclude any sinner from this great salvation. Every part of the plan is free from ambiguity: our wants are distinctly stated; promises are given exactly answering to them; means are appointed, in which we may apply for the performance of these promises; and God pledges the honour of his faithfulness, that every one who seeks the blessing in the appointed way, shall certainly obtain it. Delays and difficulties may intervene to prove our sincerity; but sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God shall fail of its accomplishment.

The assistance likewise, proposed by the gospel, tends to produce a peculiar conduct and conversation in the true believer. Evil habits, corrupt propensities, bad connections, and strong temptations, are not easily broken off and mastered; and our resolution is found by experience to be unequal to the conflict: but the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to surmount every obstacle, and to resist and overcome all his enemies. He feels he can do nothing of himself; but he finds, "that he can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him."—Thus by "waiting on the Lord he renews his strength," and rises superior to those difficulties, which all other men find in the event to be insurmountable.

The assurances made of an abundant present and future recompence, to those who renounce temporal things for the sake of Christ and the gospel, the supports afforded in seasons of trial and affliction; the authoritative and perfect example set before us; the obligations conferred upon us, and the glorious prospects that open to our view, are all of them exceedingly influential on the believer's spirit and conduct. But we must proceed,

III. To mention some leading particulars, in which "a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ," more especially consists.

Every doctrine of the gospel requires, and is suited to produce *humility* in all its variety of exercises. The whole seems arranged on purpose to lay us low in self-abasement, to exclude all boasting and glorying in ourselves, to produce deep repentance, to render us poor in spirit and contrite in heart, and to form our dispositions teachable, lowly, unambitious, and unassuming. When therefore we speak and act in this manner, our conversation is consistent with our principles, and becomes our profession: but self-confidence, self-importance, vain-glorious vaunting, desire of praise or pre-eminence, and an unteachable, dogmatizing, or overbearing deportment, are more unbecoming and odious in an evangelical professor, than in any other person.

From this deep humility, patience, contentment, and thankfulness must proportionably arise. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed:" our sufferings are less than our iniquities; our mercies are invaluable and unmerited: our situation is appointed by God our Saviour, in perfect wisdom, truth, and love: our light afflictions are counterbalanced by divine consolations; and they "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So that it becomes us to be resigned, satisfied, and thankful in every

Digitized by Google

circumstance; and repining, fretfulness, and discontent are entirely inconsistent with evangelical principles.

Confidence in God likewise peculiarly becometh the gospel of Christ. "The Lord is our Light, and our Salvation: whom then shall we fear?" "If God be for us, who can be against us?" To be calm and collected in perilous situations; to recognize the hand of God in the alarming events of life, and hence to assume courage and chearful expectation; to rely on his providential care amidst temporal losses and difficulties; and in every case to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" becomes the character of his redeemed people. But too often he may rebuke us and say, "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"—We act also consistently with our principles, when we take pleasure in attending on the ordinances of God; when we count the holy day of rest honourable and delightful; when we are glad to have it said to us, "Let us go unto the house of the Lord;" and when we prefer his courts, and the communion of the saints, above all other places of resort, and every other kind of society. It becomes the professors of the gospel, to abound in praises and thanksgivings; to reverence the name and the word of God; to worship him in their families with evident alacrity and punctuality; to seek his blessing on every undertaking; to praise him for every deliverance and benefit; to act habitually as in his presence; to devote themselves to his service; and to seek all their happiness from him. But whatever is contrary to this is unbecoming the gospel, and dishonourable to our profession.

Even worldly men, while they charge our doctrines with a licentious tendency, expect more from us in our conduct towards them, than they do from each other. This is evidently the case: for a single instance of immorality, in one that professes the gospel, excites general attention, and becomes a topic of discourse; while the numberless crimes of other men are very slightly noticed. This should remind us, that strict integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality to our engagements, become our profession; and that both the world and the church will charge us with inconsistency, if we at all deviate from this direct uprightness of conduct and conversation. An inoffensive deportment is likewise necessary, if we would walk "worthy of God," and "as it becometh saints." We must no more injure a man, wantonly or heedlessly, than from selfishness: We must not wound any person's character, interrupt his domestic comfort, or needlessly disquiet his mind. We should carefully avoid exciting men's passions, provoking them to anger, or tempting them to envy, ambition, or discontent. We should "study to be quiet and mind our own business," without intermeddling with other men's matters; and to be peaceable, orderly, and industrious neighbours, and members of the community. We ought so to avoid evil, and the appearance of evil, that none may have any thing to say against us, except it be for our religious peculiarities.

General benevolence also becomes the gospel of rich grace and mercy. Every man almost, may at some times, by retrenching superfluities, do a little to shew his compassion and good-will to his afflicted neighbours. From those to whom much is given much shall be required. There are likewise various other methods, by which a friendly disposition may be manifested; and this is peculiarly ornamental to the gospel. The more entirely we renounce all dependence on our good works, the greater alacrity and zeal we should manifest in performing them: and this will be our disposition, if, indeed "we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," and understand our obligations to him, who "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Indeed, even in this lukewarm age, the excellency of the gospel does appear in this respect; for the liberality of those, who profess to rely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is vastly greater, in proportion to their circumstances, than that of such persons, as expect to atone for their sins, and to purchase heaven, by their good works. But "we beseech you," brethren, "to abound more and more."

Digitized by Google

We should also exercise meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and unwearied perseverance in endeavouring to overcome evil with good; for these things peculiarly become those, who own themselves so deeply indebted to the pardoning mercy and abundant grace of God our Saviour. An exact attention to every relative duty; a condescending, affable, and modest demeanour, "in honour preferring one another;" a constant endeavour to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" to promote brotherly love; and to concur in every design, for advancing the purity and enlargement of the church, and the benefit of mankind, are evidently and eminently becoming the gospel of Christ.

To these we should add, habits of strict sobriety and temperance: moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful, and in worldly pursuit; and indifference about external decoration; and entire disregard to these frivolous amusements, in which numbers waste their time and substance; a disinterested conduct, remote from all suspicion of covetousness; a strict government of the passions; and a tongue bridled and refrained from vain and improper discourse, but prepared to speak such things as are edifying and useful. These are evidently parts of that conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ; and reflection may enable every one to add to this specimen many others of a similar nature. We proceed therefore,

IV. To make some observations on the emphatical word "Only."

Some persons think, that the apostle meant in this manner to intimate the reasonableness of his exhortations; and no doubt we have abundant cause to consider them in this light; yet I apprehend that it is not the import of the expression in this place. It rather implies that nothing could prove injurious in the event to professed Christians, provided their conversation were consistent with their principles. And we may apply this general instruction to various cases.

There may be wars and rumours of war, famines, pestilences, revolutions, and distress of nations with perplexity; yea, the sun shall be turned into darkness, the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all its works shall be burnt up: but none of these events need alarm the consistent Christian: For "what shall separate us from the love Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Rom. viii. 35—39. "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the depths of the sea." Psalm xlvi. 1, 2.

Affecting changes may likewise take place in our families: our beloved relatives may be torn from us, our friends alienated, and our property lost; poverty, contempt, and sickness, may oppress us; and we may fall under unmerited censure and reproach, so that even our brethren may mistake our case and character, as Job's friends did his: but "if our conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ," none of these things can hurt us. The Lord will enable us to rejoice in the testimony of our conscience; he will plead our cause, and vindicate our reputation; he will not leave us comfortless, but will afford us proportionable supports: "No weapon formed against us shall prosper, and every tongue that ariseth against us in judgment we shall condemn;" and when we have been tried we shall come forth as gold purified from the furnace.

Changes may likewise take place in the church: many who have been useful to us, may be removed, and among them the very "ministers by whom we believed;" nay, such persons as we most looked up to, may "forsake Christ, having loved this present world;" or become zealous teachers of destructive heresies. But if our conversation be consistent with our profession; our own experience of the Lord's faithfulness, and the sanctifying efficacy of his word, will preserve us from fatal effects, and teach us by such events, to be more watchful, and simple in our dependence on divine grace.

Digitized by Google

Some persons may be perplexed with difficulties, in respect of certain points of doctrine; but if they truly embrace the salvation of Christ and walk worthy of it, they will be at length led to establishment in the truth. "If any man *will* do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." An upright heart and an obedient will, directly tend to free the mind from the clouds of various prejudices and passions, to produce teachableness, and to improve spiritual discernment; and there are numerous promises of divine teaching to persons of this description. But they "who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil," are given up to strong delusions, and fall into final condemnation.

Difficulties also occur to many, in determining whether they be in a state of salvation or not; nor are they able, after much self-examination, to decide the important question. To these likewise we may say, "Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ;" and this will have a powerful, though gradual efficacy, in producing the desired satisfaction. "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." "For the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

The exhortation before us also points out, to those who are labouring to do good in their families and connections, or in a more extensive sphere, the grand method of obtaining the desired success; and when the interest of the gospel in any place seems greatly declined; the consistent conduct of the few who adhere to it, will have the happiest effects in promoting a revival. Finally some persons are harrassed with apprehensions of future trials and temptations, or with the dread of death; but let all such trembling believers attend to the apostle's exhortation; and they may rest assured, that the grace of the Lord Jesus will be sufficient for them; and his strength be perfected in their weakness. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Seeing we address ourselves to those only, who expect to be thought Christians, the exhortation may be applicable to every individual. Let a becoming conversation prove that you are Christians in reality. But alas, what gloomy reflections crowd into the mind, when this subject comes in our way! Do the generality of nominal Christians live as becomes the gospel? Is not the conversation of a vast majority diametrically opposite to the spirit and precepts of our holy religion? Who can imagine that Christ will own such men as his true disciples? Who can doubt, but that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for them?

There are persons who say, 'When you instruct us in our duty, we regard you; but we are not infidels, we have always believed the doctrines of Christianity.' But let me ask you, have these doctrines properly influenced your heart and life? If they have not, then surely you have believed in vain! You would say to an Antinomian professor of justification by faith alone, who lived an immoral life, "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." Beware then lest you slide into Antinomianism of a more reputable kind. Faith and practice are not like grapes tied upon a vine branch, but like grapes growing upon a living vine. True faith receives the doctrines of the gospel into the heart, where they produce a change in the judgments, dispositions, and affections; thus the tree becomes good, and good fruit is the genuine consequence.

This is real Christianity: and all that comes short of this, however distinguished, is a mere name, notion, or form. But if we have thus received the gospel, we shall be conscious that we have in many things fallen short of a becoming conversation. Let us then humbly seek forgiveness of the past, and beg to be enabled henceforth so to abide in Christ, "that we may bring forth much fruit." "and walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory."—Amen.

Digitized by Google

THE

WARRANT AND NATURE

OF

FAITH IN CHRIST

CONSIDERED,

WITH

SOME REFERENCE TO THE VARIOUS CONTROVERSIES ON THAT SUBJECT.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.—Acts xvi. 31.
Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.—1 John v. 1.
I speak as unto wise men: judge ye what I say.—1 Cor. x. 15.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

INTRODUCTION.

To those who are convinced that all men are lost sinners, in absolute need of a Saviour, and that all things are ready in Jesus Christ for the complete salvation of every believer; a more important question can scarcely be proposed, than that which relates to the *warrant* and *nature* of saving faith. At first sight indeed the subject appears very easy: and a reflecting person, conversant with the holy Scriptures, and unacquainted with controversy, will seldom be much perplexed with difficulties respecting it. But men have so bewildered themselves and each other by speculations, and controversies have been so multiplied and managed; that the simple testimony of Scripture is frequently disregarded, or even wrested from its obvious meaning to establish preconceived opinions: while the authority of men is appealed to, in support of evident deviation from the plain meaning of the inspired writers.

These are obvious sources of mistake and perplexity; and another may also be properly noticed. Pious men, who never intended to form a party, have been so grieved by witnessing the fatal effects of prevailing errors, and so haunted with the dread of more extensive mischief; that they have been driven into the opposite extreme, as the only effectual remedy. Thus, able and valuable persons, in their zeal for or against certain opinions, write more like *special pleaders*, than calm inquirers after important truth. Their arguments are consequently often inconclusive: their opponents readily discover where they are most vulnerable: and then by acting the same part, they lay themselves open to similar retorts. In the mean while the minds of numbers are perplexed instead of satisfied: and much disputation about matters stated in Scripture with great simplicity and perspicuity, serves to cherish a sceptical spirit among the more unconcerned witnesses of the contest.

In the early part of the present century, the doctrine of *justification by faith* in the Son of God was comparatively but little attended to in this country: and the honoured instruments, whom God employed to revive a more general knowledge of it, were naturally led to insist on the important subject with peculiar earnestness, and in the most energetic language. Some of them were so fully engaged in active services, as to have little leisure for study: and if they sometimes dropped an expression, in the vehemence of an honest zeal, which was capable of miscontruction: every candid man must acquit them of *intending* any thing unfavourable to practical godliness, which they eminently promoted and exemplified.—But men arose afterwards, who attempted to establish unscriptural *systems* on a few of their detached expressions, and on their fervent addresses to large and affected auditories; or at least to

Digitized by Google

support such systems by their authority: and very respectable persons have been led to patronize and sanction their mistakes.—Indeed this was no more than re-acting the same scenes which had been exhibited by the first reformers from popery, and some of their successors, in whose writings the substance of almost all the controversies of these late years was fully discussed.

While matters were taking this turn in England, some eminent divines in North America, * who had deeply studied these subjects, and had abundant opportunity of observing the practical effects of the different opinions, attempted with great ability to stem the torrent. But in doing this, they seem rather to have gone too far, and to have thrown impediments in the sinner's path, when endeavouring with trembling steps to come unto the gracious Saviour. Perhaps they insist unduly on the necessity of a man's *seeing* the justice of God in his condemnation as a transgressor of the holy law, before he can believe in Christ to salvation; whereas *allowing* it, or *submitting* to it, seems to be all that is absolutely necessary, though not all that is desirable or attainable. In other instances likewise they do not seem sufficiently to distinguish between *seeing* and *believing*.—They appear, to me at least, not to make sufficient allowance for the imbecility of natural capacity in numbers; their want of education and habits of reasoning; the erroneous and partial instructions afforded them; the effects of custom, prejudices, and associated ideas; and the small degree of life, light, faith, and grace, which may subsist along with a large proportion of error and inconsistency. They ascribe many things merely to natural principles, excited by the common influences of the Spirit, which the Scriptures represent as the effect of renewing grace. They reject, as wholly *selfish*, such exercises of faith in Christ and cries for mercy, as the word of God in its obvious meaning unreservedly encourages; and sometimes they seem to intimate, that an almost total disregard to our own happiness is essential to true grace. They do not in all instances clearly distinguish that wise and holy *self-love*, which God originally implanted in our nature, to which he renews us by grace, which is the measure of our love to others, and which seeks its happiness in the enjoyment of God alone; from that carnal, apostate, and foolish self-love, which is the consequence of the fall, affects independence on the Creator, and seeks its gratification from the creature,—In short, some of their principles, if carried to their full and legitimate consequences, would condemn many as false professors, whom God will own as real though weak believers; and thus "they quench the smoking flax, and break the bruised reed."—Perceiving that "while men slept, an enemy had sown tares in the field;" they seem to have been too earnest to root up the tares, and to have been in danger of rooting up the wheat also: not duly recollecting, that they cannot be wholly separated in this world, but must be left "to grow together until the harvest."

On these grounds a general prejudice has prevailed against their writings; and the very important instructions contained in them, which equal, and perhaps exceed any thing published in modern times, have been comparatively disregarded: so that few derive from them those advantages, which they are eminently suited to afford; especially to the pastors of the church, in respect of the *essential* difference between genuine experimental religion, and every kind of counterfeit. †—At the same time a controversy has been strenuously maintained in another part of the church, (in its present lamentably divided state) "Whether it be the duty of sinners to believe in Christ?" "And whether ministers ought to exhort and invite them to believe?" Nor can it be denied that the reasonings of those, who have taken the *negative* side in this dispute, have a very bad tendency. They deter ministers from addressing their hearers in the manner which the Scriptures exemplify; they quiet the consciences of the careless and irreligious, as if neglect of Christ and his salvation were their *misfortune* not their *crime:* they advance principles,

* President Edwards, Dr Bellamy, &c.
† See that admirable work, Edwards on the Affections.

Digitized by Google

which render it necessary for men to *know* themselves converted, before they begin to pray for spiritual blessings, or to apply for salvation; and thus they perplex the minds of awakened sinners with *doubtful disputations*, till "the devil comes, and takes the seed out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

These things being so, we need not greatly wonder, if they, who justly consider the gospel as glad tidings of free salvation to the chief of sinners, take the alarm: and if any of them, in the warmth of their zeal, drop incautious expressions, capable of misconstruction and perversion to bad purposes, it is no more than has generally occurred to similar cases. And should a by-stander, who has derived much instruction from the writings of several persons, engaged on all sides in these controversies, endeavour, in the spirit of meekness, to state what he considers as the scriptural medium on the controverted points; he surely need not be apprehensive lest *such men* should say, "who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?"

In the quiet recess of his study, the author of these pages has long and seriously examined the subject; and he has carefully noticed the effects of the several opinions, on the spirit and conduct of those who maintained them, and on the minds of such as were mere spectators of the contest. And several persons, who have favourably received his other publications have expressed a wish for his explicit sentiments respecting it. He therefore feels himself in some respects required to give the result of his inquiries, and to assign his reasons for differing in a measure from those, who have written on both sides of the question.—He is well aware, that great candour, caution, and impartiality, are requisite so to state his views as to give no just offence to any party concerned. He has well considered, and may indirectly answer, the principal objections and arguments, which have on all sides been advanced against the doctrine he maintains: but he purposes to decline all direct controversy.—He means not to support his sentiments by any human authority, (though many of the writers of the last century would fully bear him out, perhaps in every particular:) but he would singly abide by the testimony of Scripture. The general subject will be divided into two questions, "*What is the sinner's warrant for believing in Christ?*" And, "*Is saving faith an holy exercise of the heart or no?*" These two questions are far from coincident; and the want of duly distinguishing them introduces much perplexity into men's reasonings and discourses on the subject.—Many other sources of ambiguity and misapprehension will be adverted to, as the work proceeds: and *perspicuity* will above all things be consulted; for the author greatly desires to be clearly understood, that the reader may be enabled to perceive whether or not his views be scriptural and his arguments conclusive.—He needs only add, that he most earnestly recommends to every one, who feels difficulties on the subject, to weigh what is advanced in the spirit of prayer; that the giver of all wisdom may enlighten his mind, and prepare his heart to receive the truth in love; and to rectify every mistake into which he may have been betrayed, as far as it impedes his comfort, fruitfulness, and usefulness in the world.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE

WARRANT AND NATURE

OF

FAITH IN CHRIST.

PART I.

THE SINNER'S WARRANT FOR BELIEVING IN CHRIST.

SECTION I.

THE SUBJECT OPENED.

THE word *warrant* though common in the writings of modern divines, is not once found in Scripture, which uniformly represents faith in Christ as the *duty* of all who hear the gospel; and no *warrant* is required for obedience to a plain commandment. As, however, an inestimable privilege is connected with the performance of this duty, it may properly be inquired, what reason a sinner has for expecting such a benefit from his offended God? In this sense the *warrant* of faith signifies "that, which authorizes any person to believe in the Lord Jesus; and gives him a ground of confidence, that he shall thus obtain eternal salvation."

But it is necessary to inquire what is meant by *faith in Christ:* as without precision in this particular, the discussion might be involved in great perplexity; because the terms *faith, believing,* and *believing in Christ,* are used in different senses, frequently by the same authors; and still more by those who are engaged on opposite sides.

Faith, in its more general acceptation, is the "belief of the truth;" or "a cordial consent to the testimony of God in his holy word, with reference to our own concern in it." *Faith in Christ* implies "a cordial consent to the testimony of God respecting his Son; connected with a humble and earnest application to the divine Redeemer for salvation; and a willing and unreserved acceptance of him, in his whole character and his several distinct offices, according to the method revealed, and the directions given, in the holy Scriptures." Not that I would exclude the idea of *reliance,* but I thus state the nature of faith, merely to prevent mistakes in an argumentative discussion. The language of believers, as recorded in the Old Testament, when they speak of "hoping in God," "trusting under the shadow of his wings," or making "his name their strong tower;" and when they call him their Rock, their Refuge, their Habitation, and their Portion, always implies this earnest application to him for protection, salvation, and comfort, and

Digitized by Google

never an *indolent* dependence of expectation. This is evident from other expressions, which they frequently subjoin; such as "I lift up my soul unto thee." "I cry unto thee daily." "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord;" "My soul followeth hard after thee, thy right hand upholdeth me;" "I pour out my soul unto thee;" and many others. The description of faith in Christ, given in this treatise, is not therefore at all inconsistent with the soul's thus resting itself on God, hanging upon him, and always expecting help from him: and if that idea do not appear sufficiently *prominent*, that arises from the nature of the subject, which relates to one important topic in divinity, and not to every part of a believer's experience.

When the doctrines of the gospel are assented to, and men are convinced by argument that there is no salvation, except by faith in Christ; they may more readily *imagine* that they *rely on him*, or *confide in him* to save them, than that they are *daily and earnestly applying to him for salvation*. I apprehend numbers think that they *rely on Christ*, even while they habitually neglect the means of grace, especially *secret prayer*; or while they attend to it *formally*, as an irksome duty, without importunity, fervency, or entering into the particularities of their case.—But the idea of *believing application to Christ* precludes this way of self-deception, without discouraging any upright inquirer: as it represents sinners by faith seeking help for their souls from an invisible Saviour, according to their feeling sense of sin and misery; as the blind and lame, the lepers and paralytics, did for their bodies, when he was visibly present on earth. As an instance how much the idea of *reliance*, considered as an adequate definition of faith in Christ, may be abused, I once heard a poor prostitute, *when avowedly determined on pursuing her infamous course of life*, ward off the conviction that she was in the road to eternal destruction, by expressing a firm reliance on God's mercy, and on the love of Christ who shed his blood to save poor sinners!

Having premised these particulars concerning the general nature of faith, I would observe, that if any persons mean by *faith in Christ*, "a confident persuasion, that Christ died for them in particular, that they are in a justified state, and shall certainly inherit everlasting life:" it is not only granted, but strenuously maintained, that no man is warranted thus to believe concerning himself, except as he has clear proof that he is "in Christ a new creature," and "has crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts;" for this, and vastly more to the same purpose, is constantly spoken of in the Scriptures concerning all true Christians without exception. Properly speaking, this confident persuasion of a personal interest in Christ, if well grounded, is *hope*, or *the full assurance of hope*; and is opposed to *presumption*, or a groundless confidence of salvation: nor can it be obtained or preserved, except by walking in all the commandments and ordinances of God with persevering diligence.—Again, if faith in Christ be considered as "A reliance on him for salvation *from future punishment*, without heartily seeking to him for deliverance from *sin* and from this present evil world, or falling in with the whole design of his coming in the flesh;" no man is or can be warranted *thus* to believe on him: for this is a mere selfish desire and presumptuous confidence of escaping misery and obtaining happiness, without the least real understanding of the nature, or value for the blessings, of that holy salvation which the Scriptures propose to us. For in fact, it is nothing better than the cry of the evil spirits, when they besought Christ not to torment them; except as these too well knew God's purposes to expect final impunity.

A few other remarks may tend to elucidate the subject. We are told that "Faith is the evidence of things not seen," as it credits the whole of God's sure testimony, concerning things invisible and future: and "the substance of things hoped for," as it realizes the substantial and eternal blessings which are brought to light by the gospel. It is not then a *new faculty* of the soul; but the exercise of our original faculties in a manner *new* to us as sinners. To believe testimony, to rely on promises, and to expect the performance of them from the faithfulness of him who made them, are an

Digitized by Google

natural to us as any other act of the rational soul; and indeed almost all the business of life is conducted by this very principle: but the things which the Lord testifies, proposes, and promises, are so foreign to our apprehensions, so contrary to our prejudices, so humiliating to our pride, so disquieting to our consciences, and opposite to our carnal passions and pursuits, that we have no disposition cordially and obediently to believe them, till a change has taken place in our hearts. When, however, a man is properly disposed to believe divine truth in general, either speedily or gradually, he will be led to consider and credit the testimony of God concerning his Son, and so to believe in Christ for salvation. But this faith must imply some perception and understanding of the nature of salvation, some conviction that we need it, and some desire after it; unless any one be supposed to seek an object, of which he knows nothing, of which he feels no want, and about which he has not the least concern! It must also imply a *virtual* renouncing of all other confidences to depend on Christ alone, a willingness to use the appointed means, and a disposition rather to part with every thing, than to fall short of an interest in him. For "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matt. xiii. 44—46. This language of our Lord is so decided, and the difference between him "who went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions," and those "who left all and followed him," is so strongly marked, that we cannot on scriptural grounds allow that any man truly believes, if he is inwardly determined to renounce Christ, rather than part with some worldly object. It may indeed be urged, that these things are the *effects* of faith, and not implied in its *nature;* but assuredly the least exercise of true faith in Christ constitutes a man his disciple; yet he expressly says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he *cannot be my disciple.*" Luke xiv. 25—27. If therefore these are effects of faith, they spring immediately and invariably from its essential nature.—Awakened sinners often hesitate long before they can be induced thus unreservedly to renounce all selfish confidence and worldly idols, for the sake of Christ and his salvation: some shrinking back on one account, and some on another, as carnal lusts, self-wise or self-righteous pride, fear of man, or other corrupt propensities preponderate. Even they, who really believe the testimony of God, and are convinced that the gospel is true, are frequently seduced into very criminal delays, before they decidedly "count all things but loss that they may win Christ." But every genuine exercise of faith implies these things: though in many cases, they are only discernible as the members of the body in the half-formed embryo, or the parts of the oak in the germ of the acorn.

Faith in Christ is, therefore, the sinner's believing obedient application to the Saviour: reliance on him, and his power, truth, and love; on what he did and suffered on earth, and is now doing in heaven; and on his promises and covenant-engagements, for complete and everlasting salvation: cordial acceptance of him, according to the word of God, in all his characters and offices: and confidential entrusting the immortal soul with all its eternal interests into his hands, from a feeling sense that he needs this salvation; a perception in some degree of its suitableness and value, an approbation and desire of it above all things, and a dread of coming short of it more than any other evil. Such is the idea of *faith in Christ* adhered to throughout this work; and they, who have formed other notions concerning *faith*, will of course object to many things contained in it. This should therefore in the first place be considered with peculiar attention; and some deliberate judgement formed on the general nature of faith in Christ, whether this be or be not a scriptural account of it: otherwise the truth of the propositions, and the conclusiveness of the arguments, contained in the subsequent pages, will not be clearly perceived; and the objections, which arise in the reader's mind,

Digitized by Google

may probably result from an unobserved difference of sentiment on the subject before us. Let this then be well weighed, and impartially compared with the sacred Scriptures.

These things being premised, it is here maintained, "*That the sinner wants no warrant of any kind for believing in Christ, except the word of God.*" No qualifications, (or qualities, endowments, or dispositions in himself,) are at all requisite to authorize his application, or encourage his hope of success; unless any one should choose, with manifest impropriety, to call his willingness to be saved in the Lord's way, a *qualification*. "Him that cometh to Christ, he will *in no wise* cast out;" and they, who do not come when they hear the gospel, have as good a *warrant* as they that do; but they will not avail themselves of it, because they comparatively despise the proffered benefit.—I shall first establish the position by scriptural proofs; and then assign some reasons for insisting on it.

SECTION II.

Scriptural proofs that the sinner wants no warrant for believing in Christ, except the word of God.

First, then, the commission and instructions which our Lord gave to his apostles, compared with their conduct and that of their fellow-labourers, are conclusive on the subject. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark xvi. 15, 16. Nothing can be more evident, than that every human being, however vile, is warranted to believe in Christ, by this declaration of the gospel itself: and that nothing is or can be wanting, but a *disposition* to accept of the proposed salvation. The other instructions given to the apostles were, beyond all doubt, coincident with this commission, though on several accounts they were worded rather differently: Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Luke xxiv. 47. but one direction, couched under a parable, particularly suits our purpose. "Go ye into the highways and hedges, and *compel* them to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke xiv. 23. Now what further *warrant* could a poor traveller or beggar stand in need of, who was desirous of admission to a feast, after the servants had been sent with express orders, to use the most urgent invitations, persuasions, intreaties, and assurances of a hearty welcome, in order to induce him to compliance?

The conduct of the apostles and evangelists show how they understood their instructions. They always called on their hearers, without exception or limitation, to believe in Christ: knowing that all, who became willing, by the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying the word, would be thus encouraged without delay to embrace the gracious invitation, and that the rest would be left without excuse. Thus Peter speaks of his ministry, "God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe." Acts xv. 7—9. Nothing else, except *the word of the gospel*, was required to warrant the faith of the Gentiles.

Paul, addressing the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, said, "Be it known to you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things. Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." Acts xiii. 38—41. He was sensible, that there were *despisers* in the company, whom he warned of the consequences of unbelief: yet he preached forgiveness of sins and justification by faith to all present, without exception; which he would not have

Digitized by Google

done, if the gospel had not been a sufficient warrant to authorize every one of them to believe in Christ for salvation.

The same apostle calls his office, "*The ministry of reconciliation;*" and says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v. 18—20. If one, who till then had been an enemy of God and Christ, had asked the apostle, how he might be reconciled? would he not have answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;" for "God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him?"

II. The invitations of Scripture evidently prove the point in question. The Lord, by his prophet, calls on those, who "are spending their money for that which is not bread, and labouring for that which satisfieth not," to come to him for all the blessings of his everlasting covenant. Isaiah lv. 1—3. Such as seek happiness in worldly vanities, or aim to please God by empty forms and superstitions, or go about to establish their own righteousness, are alike described in the very terms of the invitation; nor are the most stupid worshippers of idols, or the vilest workers of iniquity excluded.—"On the great day of the feast, Jesus stood, and cried, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." John vii. 37. No one in that large company, who thirsted for salvation, or for happiness, was excluded by the terms of this proclamation.—But, lest any should suppose that this only warrants the faith of such as are conscious that they thirst in a *spiritual manner;* he afterwards, appearing in vision to his servant John, explains his meaning more fully; "Let him that is athirst come, and *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. xxii. 17. This is surely a sufficient *warrant* for every one that is *willing;* and, however unencumbered or universal the invitation may be, none but the *willing* can be expected to comply with it. But while the gospel is preached men *become willing*, who were not so before: nay, a desire to be made willing may very properly be formed into a prayer; and then it falls under the general assurance, "Ask, and it shall be given you;—for every one that asketh receiveth."

Wisdom calls to the sons of men, and thus expostulates with them; "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." Can any further warning for faith in Christ, and for applying to him for his complete salvation, be required for the most careless, scornful, or profligate sinner on earth, whenever he comes with a sincere and willing mind?

In the parable of the marriage-supper, many, by *the king's express command*, were urgently and repeatedly invited, who in the event never tasted of the feast. These were excluded merely because they *would* not come, but *made light* of the invitation, and went to their farms and merchandize. And whatever we understand by the wedding-garment, it must be considered as supplied by him who made the feast: for the servants were sent "into the highways, and as many as they could find," they were ordered "to bid to the marriage;" but how should poor beggars, or even travellers, be provided, on such an unexpected occasion, with raiment suited to a royal feast? The discovery, therefore, of the man "who had not on the wedding-garment," represents the case of those professors, whose faith is dead, and whose confidence is groundless; and consequently it has nothing to do with the *warrant* for a sinner to believe in Christ. Matt. xxii. 1—14.

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." But if the word of the gospel were not a sufficient warrant, a man might truly believe in Christ, and yet perish for want of such a warrant.—Christ said to the woman of Samaria, who was at that time living in habitual gross wickedness, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked, and he would have given thee

Digitized by Google

living water." The *asking* here mentioned, could be no other than a believing application to Christ for salvation; and a knowledge of Him, and of the mercy and grace of God in him, would have influenced the woman to make this application, for which she had already a sufficient *warrant*. Afterwards we are informed, that "many of the Samaritans believed on him, for the saying of the woman:"—"and many more believed because of his own word:" John iv. 10, 39—42. so that they, who before "knew not what they worshipped," wanted no other *warrant* for faith in Christ, except his word, or even the words of others concerning him.

Our Lord's address to the lukewarm self-sufficient Laodiceans shall close this argument. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Rev. iii. 17, 18. Was not this *counsel* a sufficient *warrant* to any Laodicean, whatever his previous character had been, to apply to Christ for these blessings, as soon as he felt the least degree of desire to obtain them? Yet the word *buy* intimates, that none would thus apply, but those who renounced false confidences and worldly idols for the sake of Him and his salvation.

III. Faith in Christ is an act of obedience to the command of God; and unbelief is the most ruinous and the most provoking of sins. When the Father, in a voice from heaven, proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, *hear ye him*," Matt. xvii. 5, it may perhaps be argued, that he only required the three apostles then present to hear, believe, and obey their Lord: but Peter addressed the unbelieving Jews in the very same manner, by applying to them the words of Moses; "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which shall not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed." Acts iii. 22, 23; vii. 37. Now, can it be imagined, that the Jews were commanded to *hear* Christ, and yet not commanded to *believe in him*? or would such a *hearing* without *believing* have preserved them from the threatened destruction?—"This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ:" 1 John iii. 23. but it would be a very extraordinary commandment, if none were required to obey it, except such as had done so already!

The obedience of faith implies obedience *in believing*, as well as that obedience which springs from faith. Thus the apostle says, "Ye have *obeyed from the heart* the form of doctrine delivered unto you."—"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not *obey the truth*?" "They have not all *obeyed the gospel*; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. vi. 17; x. 12—17. Gal. iii. 1. Now what can we infer from such language of the Holy Spirit, but that "God, who commandeth all men every where to repent," commandeth likewise all men every where to believe in his Son? We must conclude from it, that believing in Christ is an act of obedience to a divine command; though it doth not justify the sinner as obedience, but as interesting him in the divine righteousness of the Saviour: yea, that *believing* is the principal part of the obedience which God by the gospel requires of sinners; the first command given to condemned transgressors of his holy law, as placed under a dispensation of mercy; the most explicit token they can give of a disposition to submit to him, and return to a state of subjection to his authority. But if this be indeed the truth, no man can want any other *warrant* for faith in Christ, than the commandment itself which enjoins it.

The point will, however, be more fully established, by considering the language of the Scriptures concerning *unbelief*. "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of

Digitized by Google

his Son." "He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, *because their deeds were evil.* For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." 1 John v. 10—12. John iii. 18—20. It is not only certain *in fact*, that "he who believeth not shall be damned;" but *unbelief* is the special ground of his condemnation: because *it springs from hatred of the truth of God, through determined love of sin.* This our Lord elsewhere illustrates. Having said to the Jews, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life:" he adds, "How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" John v. 39—47. Disregard to God, and inordinate love of worldly honour, were the reasons, why these men did not, and could not, believe in Christ.—"Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do. He was a murderer;—he is a liar and the father of it: and because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." John viii. 43—47. A disposition like that of the devil, rendered the persons in question incapable of believing Christ's words, or of coming to him for salvation.—"When He" (the Comforter) "is come, he shall convince the world of sin;—because they believe not in me." The sin of disbelieving and crucifying the Messiah seems to have been immediately presented to the consciences of the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, when they were so pricked in their hearts as to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And indeed, according to the degree of previous information, or means of information, or means of instruction, convinced sinners are almost always peculiarly distressed in conscience, by recollecting their former proud and carnal neglect and contempt of the gospel. Nay they frequently imagine it to be even the *unpardonable sin:* and this sometimes opens the way to powerful and durable temptations to despair, of which several instances have fallen under the writer's observation. The criminality of unbelief is indeed a species of guilt, of which the world at large has no conception, and which never troubles the consciences of mere moralists or formal Pharisees: but what real Christian can deny, that rejection of Christ implies a high degree of enmity against God and his authority and glory; a contempt of his wisdom as foolishness, of his infinite mercy as needless, or of his authenticated truth as falsehood? The unbeliever says in his heart unto God, "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways:" or, "I shall have peace, in the way of my own heart," though I reject the way of "peace revealed in the gospel."

St. Paul mentions some, "that are contentious, and will not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness;" and of men, "to whom God sends strong delusion to believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who *believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*" So that the love of sin, and taking pleasure in it, effectually prevent men from "receiving the love of the truth that they might be saved:" and this throws light upon another most alarming declaration of the apostle, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven—taking vengeance on them that know not God, and *obey not the gospel*—who shall be punished with everlasting destruction." Rom. ii. 8 .2 Thess. i. 7—10; ii. 10—12.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you *an evil heart of unbelief*, in departing from the living God." "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your hearts.*" "Ye do always *in your hearts.*" It is therefore evident, that the scriptures represent unbelief and rejection of Christ, as springing from the corrupt state of the *heart.* "How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For, if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." Heb. ii. 3; iii.; xii. 25. We should therefore consider *unbelief*, not merely

Digitized by Google

as an occasional circumstance in the sinner's condemnation, in that it leaves him without remedy under the curse of the law; but as the direct cause of his condemnation; the most provoking disobedience to God's express command, connected with a contemptuous refusal of his unspeakable mercy, resulting from reigning pride, rooted enmity, and determined love of sin in one form or other.

But if this be the case, it must certainly be the duty of all, who hear or may hear the gospel, to believe in Christ: and then it must follow, that no man wants any further *warrant* for his faith, except the Lord's own word, his testimony, invitation, and command, and his promise "*in no wise* to cast out any one who comes to him."

It may be useful to illustrate this important subject by an apposite similitude. Suppose a Physician should give the most public notice that he will bestow advice, medicines, and every other requisite, on all the sick persons in a certain district, who come and put themselves under his care. This notice would be a sufficient *warrant;* and no sick person, within that district, could want any other for applying to the physician, and expecting him to do all in his power for his recovery. But some might deem themselves so little indisposed as not to need assistance; and others, being wealthy or proud, might disdain a gratuitous cure. Some might be too busy or slothful, or self-indulgent, to pay due regard to their health; while others would place no confidence in the physician's skill, or the sincerity of his proposal. Nay, it is possible, there might be persons, who pretend to expect a cure from him, while they neglected to take his medicines or follow his directions.—Certainly none of these would derive any benefit from him: yet this would not arise from the want of a further *warrant;* but from their not considering his public notice, as "a faithful saying, and worthy of their acceptation." He who felt himself diseased, who desired a cure, confided in the physician's skill and faithfulness, and applied to him and observed his directions, might reasonably expect a cure. But should any man, professing to regard the public notice, as a sufficient *warrant* to rely on the physician for the recovery of his health, confidently imagine himself well, or in the way to be cured, though he never had consulted him; he would be thought insane or delirious. Should another apply, and yet refuse to follow the prescriptions and directions given him; he would be deemed insincere, or trifling with his own health and life; and if he seriously expected a cure in this way, he too must be deemed a madman. Should a third contend, that he ought not to apply to the physician, till he had made himself better and a more proper and deserving object of his attention; every one would perceive the absurdity of his conduct. Finally, should any one imagine that he *was recovered;* while his languor, want of appetite, inability for work, and other symptoms, proved him to be as diseased as ever; it must be concluded, either that he had not applied to the physician, or not taken his medicines, or that the physician could not or would not do any thing effectual in his case.—The reader requires no help, in accommodating the circumstances of this illustration: in natural things men exercise common sense; while too many speculate on religious subjects in a manner which contradicts its most obvious suggestions.

The same things are implied in a general invitation to a feast; which is the illustration repeatedly employed by the Holy Spirit. Without an appetite, a relish for the provisions, and some confidence in him who gives us the invitation, men will make light of it: yet they, who go their way, have the same *warrant* to come to the feast, as those who actually partake of it.

The sincere beggar feels his poverty, desires relief, submits to the humiliating circumstances of his condition, and supplicates his more affluent neighbour in the best manner he can: yet these are not his *warrant* for applying and expecting help; but he takes his encouragement from the wealth or bounty of him, of whom he solicits relief; and if he has bidden him come, and promised in that case to help him, this constitutes his *warrant* for coming.

All the Jews had the same *warrant* to return and rebuild Jerusalem, after

Digitized by Google

Cyrus had issued his proclamation: but their settlements at Babylon, or in other places, with the perils and hardships of the attempt, would have overcome their almost expiring attachment to the holy city, if the Lord had not "stirred up the spirit" of some among them. Ez. i. 1—5. The rest had the same *warrant* but not the same *willingness* to return: and this illustration is peculiarly apposite; because the reluctancy of the Jews arose from unbelief, and the carnal state of their hearts: and their disregard to this typical redemption aptly represents the sin and folly of those, who neglect the great salvation of the gospel.

A willingness to be saved from eternal misery, and to be made eternally happy, according to men's several notions of happiness, is natural to all: but a desire of that *holy felicity* proposed in Scripture, and of that *humbling salvation from merited wrath and from all sin* which the gospel proclaims, is widely different. Yet no willingness to be saved, which leaves a man wholly unwilling to be saved in the way, and with the salvation of the gospel, can be of any use or value. The want of this willingness is the sole reason of the sinner's unbelief and destruction. They who perish from under the means of grace, have the same warrant to believe in Christ, as they who are saved: but the gospel is to most men "a price put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, while he has *no heart* to it."

The brazen serpent, lifted up in the centre of Israel's camp, with the public declaration of its use, was a sufficient *warrant* to every man, when bitten by a fiery serpent, to look unto it. But if any were so deprived of sensation as not to *feel* the fatal bite, or so stupid as not to fear approaching death; if any foolishly preferred other methods of seeking a cure, or were so proud, rebellious, and unbelieving, as to shut their eyes, or look another way; or if any looked without at all expecting a cure according to the word of the Lord, they must have perished; not for want of a *warrant* to believe; but because they did not submit to the wisdom and authority of God, or rely on his faithfulness and mercy in this appointed way of preservation.—Every man of reflection will see how these things apply to the case before us: and it is obvious thence to infer, that all sinners to whom the gospel is sent, have an equal *warrant* to believe in Christ, and to expect salvation from him, according to the holy scriptures; and that men perish for want of a disposition of heart to comply with the invitations of mercy, and to submit to the authority and commandment of God our Saviour.

SECTION III.

Some reasons for insisting on this position—"that the word of God is the sinner's only and sufficient warrant for believing in Christ."

As a *disposition* to believe is equally necessary to salvation, with a *warrant* to believe, it may perhaps be thought by some readers that it is not very important to insist so fully and strenuously upon this point; for after all the *warrant* will be of no use to those who have no heart to avail themselves of it. In considering this part of our subject, it may be observed:

I. That it is extremely futile to *suppose* the case of a man *believing without a disposition to believe;* and then gravely to make provision for it.—Whatever warrant or encouragement may be given, unless we leave matters unexplained or mis-stated, so that men think they believe when they do not, the *indisposed* will utterly disregard our words. To lay the blame therefore on the want of a *disposition* to believe, can discourage none but such as are consciously *unwilling;* and these certainly are not entitled to encouragement: but if the sinner had no *warrant* to believe, those would be discouraged who were most

Digitized by Google

of salvation; while the proud and careless would be furnished with an excuse for their unbelief.

I say, "A sincere willingness to be saved in the Lord's way is a warrant to believe in Christ; and without this it is presumption to believe;" the consequence would be, that a newly awakened person, destitute of knowledge and judgement, destitute of experience, and agitated with fears and conflicting passions, must solve to himself various questions, concerning the *nature of a sincere willingness*, and the *necessary degree* of it, before he could think himself *allowed* to come to the Saviour. Whereas, if the nature of *salvation* and of *faith* is clearly explained; and all men without exception are invited, exhorted, besought, and commanded in the name and by the authority of God, to believe in his only begotten Son; the willing come without hesitation; others feel their reluctancy to be criminal, perilous, and fatal if not overcome; convictions are frequently excited, and prayers for a willing mind presented; and God blesses his own word to break the stout heart, and bind up the broken heart, while the obstinate are left without excuse.

It is a fact, capable of the fullest proof, that in those places, where nice speculations on these subjects are avoided, men find scarcely any difficulty respecting them: but when deeply impressed with a sense of guilt and danger, and earnestly desirous of the salvation of the gospel: they apply to Christ for it, as the sick do for admission into an hospital. They seldom are troubled about a *warrant* to believe, though finding much difficulty in *actually believing*, they are led to pray with him of old, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" and are often distressed with anxious fears, lest they should not believe aright, or with a true and living faith. The language of their hearts seems to be this: "Every sinner, however vile, is invited and commanded to believe in Christ, and to come to him for salvation: therefore I may and ought to come. I now feel very desirous of these blessings, which heretofore I despised, and would gladly embrace the gracious invitation. Lord help me to believe, and teach me to come aright; for I dread nothing so much as coming short of thy salvation!" Nay, those very persons, who, previous to deep convictions, have systematically perplexed their minds with nice distinctions and doubtful disputations, are often constrained, by urgent fears and desires, to act in direct opposition to their former scheme, and to apply to Christ in the manner above described!

If any thing be considered as a *warrant* for a sinner to believe in Christ, except the word of the gospel, it must be something of an *holy* nature: so that if his convictions and desires be not *holy*, he is not *warranted* to believe.—But this would fully justify that total unbelief, which the scriptures decidedly condemn: for certainly a man *ought not* to do what he is *not warranted* to do. It likewise sets a newly awakened person to resolve one of the most difficult questions in divinity. For he must so accurately understand the nature of true holiness, as to be able, in his own concern, under great discomposure of mind, to distinguish the *minutest portion* of it from all counterfeits; and clearly to ascertain its actual existence in his heart, amidst all the immense alloy of selfish and sinful passions! It would probably be found impossible for the ablest theologian in Christendom *certainly* to determine such a question, in respect of many peculiar exercises of his own mind: how then can it be expected, that *embryo* converts, so to speak, should be able, during an overwhelming tempest, to make such accurate obervations and nice distinctions?—The general proposal of the truth, and the scriptural exhortation and assurance, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," exactly suit the case of such persons; while the event will show the nature of their convictions. Whatever better informed and more experienced persons may determine concerning the nature of saving faith, whether it be or be not an holy exercise of the heart; the convinced sinner can decide nothing of the kind in respect of his own experiences; nor can others determine the question for him: since many are alarmed, and convinced, and, as far as

Digitized by Google

we can see, *appear* even to be humbled, who never believe to the saving of the soul.

Two very small seeds may be essentially distinct in *species*, yet the best eyes, assisted by the finest glasses, can scarcely know one from the other: how then could a person, with very weak eyes and with a very dim light, certainly distinguish between them? But when they are sown and grow up, the plants that spring from them will be easily and infallibly distinguishable. Thus it is with men's convictions: some are *essentially* different from others: but all our endeavours *exactly* to know such as are *spiritual* from such as are merely *natural*, except by the event, will answer little purpose. We must judge as well as we can, and act accordingly; but we shall frequently find ourselves mistaken. How impossible then must it be for the alarmed inquirer after salvation to find a *warrant* from any holiness in himself, to encourage his application to Christ? and how wise and gracious the general language of Scripture, "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely!" While we proceed on the scriptural plan, the Lord will distinguish what we cannot. They that thirst for the pure "water of life—proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," will be encouraged to approach and take of it freely; and others will either go back into the ways of open ungodliness, or be found among the stony-ground hearers, resting in a false peace, without "sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus."

When the subject is considered in an *abstract manner*, the difference between a *warrant to believe*, and a *disposition to believe*, may at first glance appear trivial; but, viewed in its relation to experience and practice, it is immensely great and important.—It can never discourage a trembling sinner, who honestly inquires, "What he must do to be saved;" to describe the nature of faith, and explain the way of salvation; and then to invite, exhort, and persuade him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, not doubting but in so doing he will certainly be saved. But should we enter into a discussion concerning the nature of genuine convictions, gracious thirstings, and spiritual desires; maintaining that it would be unwarranted presumption for him to believe, unless conscious that his experiences were of this nature; we should exceedingly embarrass his mind; take off his thoughts from the love of Christ, and the freeness and sufficiency of his mercy and grace; and give Satan an opportunity of tempting him to despondency, or of otherwise "taking the seed out of his heart, lest he should believe and be saved." Indeed, most deviations from scriptural simplicity may be traced back to this *abstract* way of discussing doctrines: and the subjects which chiefly perplex speculating men, and furnish the most materials for controversy, appear very easy and plain when applied to practical purposes, according to the state of mind they were intended to meet. So that the wisdom and goodness of God, in not arranging revealed truths according to the supposed exactness and consistency of human systems, are most illustriously displayed, when these truths are applied to the several cases to which they are suited, for conviction, instruction, warning, encouragement, or exhortation.

Whatever be the nature of divine illumination, or whatever may have been a man's previous thoughts about it, he cannot in general, when first divinely illuminated, very readily perceive any *holiness* in the change of which he is conscious. He now discovers, as it were *intuitively*, that he is a guilty polluted creature; that his supposed virtues were specious vices, and his religious duties formal, selfish, and hypocritical; and that his heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; and in proportion to the degree of his illumination, is his conviction of these humiliating truths.—These recent discoveries (or these new *perceptions* of what perhaps he before assented to as a *notion*) occupy his thoughts: he can hardly conceive that the hearts and lives of other men are so bad as his own; still less can he think that real and eminent saints feel those evils of which he is conscious: nay, he can scarcely be convinced that his own heart was formerly so sinful as he now

Digitized by Google

finds it to be. "Without the law sin was dead:" and the spirituality of the precept not only detects, but irritates, the depravity of nature, excites all manner of concupiscence, and sometimes even stirs up the dormant enmity of the heart into direct exercises of opposition to the holy character and righteous government of God.—This is also connected with a discovery of the hatefulness of sin, and a disposition to abhor it in all its forms; so that *self-loathing* becomes a predominant part of the new convert's experience. *The stone is become flesh;* and exquisite sensibility, in feeling and hating every sinful emotion, is united to a quickness of discernment in discovering sin where not before suspected; and its odious nature and numerous aggravations, which before were excused and palliated. Every thing, therefore, concurs to discourage, as well as to *humble*, a person in this situation, except the glad tidings of the blessed gospel; and should a self-complacent thought intrude itself, while he reflected on these new and more just views of his own character, he would reject it with alarm and detestation.

Thus at the very time when the sinner is made completely willing to welcome Christ and his whole salvation, so far from perceiving *any warrant in his own holy dispositions*, to authorize his believing application to the Saviour and reliance on him, he commonly thinks himself worse than ever, and viler than any other sinner; and is often tempted to conclude that he has sinned beyond the reach of mercy, and that Christ will except him from the general rule of "casting out none that come to him."—What then can meet this case but the scriptural assurances, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you: for every one that asketh receiveth?"—And what can be more improper than to embarrass him with nice distinctions; in direct opposition to the apostolical direction, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations?—In proportion as the gospel is understood, it gives encouragement, and suggests pleas, to that man who is most vile in his own estimation. He cannot indeed say, "God, I thank thee I am not as other men:" but he may smite on his breast, and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." "I do not present my supplications before thee for my own righteousness, but for thy great mercies." The infinite and everlasting mercy of God; the all-sufficient merits, atonement, and intercession of the incarnate Son: the unencumbered invitations of the gospel, and its exhortations and injunctions, with the promises connected with them, fully warrant the vilest sinner that ever lived to apply for salvation without delay, and without any reason to fear a repulse. For they who have committed the unpardonable sin, "*cannot be renewed to repentance*," and will never thus come to Christ for his humbling holy salvation.

Trembling and almost desponding sinners seldom consider their convictions, as the effect of a supernatural influence: nor indeed do they in general reflect at all on the *cause* or *nature* of the change of which they are conscious. And when they have leisure from the tumult of their thoughts, to make inquiries of this kind; they commonly ascribe the whole to *means* and *instruments;* and frequently imagine, that if others had heard the same sermon, or read the same book, they must have been equally convinced. And having a far worse opinion of themselves, it is very difficult to make them sensible, even by the clearest evidence, that their temper of mind is really better in the sight of God, than it was before. It must therefore be impossible for a sinner in this condition to find a *warrant* for his faith in those feelings of his own mind which constitute a *disposition* to believe. Nor has he the least occasion for it; as the word of the gospel gives him a sufficient *warrant* and a most abundant encouragement "to come to Christ that he may have life."

II. Even such persons as have been long accustomed "to live by faith in the Son of God," who have frequently known "peace and joy in believing, and have abounded in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost," are sometimes overcome by temptation, or called to pass through sharp conflicts, and great

Digitized by Google

darkness and distress of soul. In these circumstances they are often led to question whether all their past experiences have not been a delusion; whether they were ever "called with an *holy* calling;" whether they ever truly loved the Lord or not. Should they then keep away from the throne of grace, and stand at an awful distance from the compassionate Physician of their souls, till they have determined these questions? Alas, they can determine nothing in this dark and doleful state! Every thing in themselves appears polluted and vile: the recollection of their past profession, advantages, and comforts, aggravates their distress, and adds weight to the burden of their guilt; so that they are often tempted to draw the most desperate conclusions concerning their state, and the Lord's intentions respecting them. But in this manner they commonly begin to emerge from their distress. "If all," say they, "*has* hitherto been self-deception, still the Lord is infinitely merciful; all things are ready; the invitations except none; and the Saviour says, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.'" Encouraged by such thoughts, "Out of the depths they cry earnestly unto the Lord:" they confess their guilt with all its aggravating circumstances, and plead his merciful forgiveness, and his plenteous redemption. Ps. cxxx. "Out of the belly of hell they look towards his holy temple," and seek his gracious deliverance; Jonah ii. and while they beseech the Lord to glorify his infinite mercy in saving them, the vilest of sinners; he "brings them out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay; he sets their feet upon a rock, and orders their goings: and he puts a new song into their mouths, even thanksgivings unto their God" and Saviour. Then indeed a brighter light shining upon their experiences, they can discern some actings of holy fear, humility, desire, faith, hope, and love, amidst the perplexities of their souls: yet they could ascertain nothing of this kind in the time of distress and dismay, when they stood most in need of encouragement.

III. But indeed the believer, who is best established in judgment and experience, and most assured in hope, does not consider his consciousness of sanctifying grace, or his upright walk and conversation, as in any sense his *warrant* for faith in Christ, or in applying to him and relying on him, for renewed pardon, and fresh supplies of wisdom, strength, grace, and consolation answerable to his daily needs. He may, and will, on some occasions, appeal to the Lord for his integrity: and as "his own heart does not condemn him" of hypocrisy, or allowed sin, "he has that confidence towards God," which he could not otherwise enjoy. 1 John iii. 19—22. He will consider his conscious love to Christ and Christians, his hatred of sin, and his delight in God's commandments, as a full proof that his faith is *living*, and his salvation sure: he may plead these things, as a reason why the Lord should defend him against the tongue of slander, maintain his cause against those that injure him, and prosper his endeavours to do good: and in various ways he may "rejoice in the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has had his conversation in the world." This is evident from numberless passages in the sacred Scriptures, and even from the prayers of the most eminent saints. But so long as a man needs forgiveness, and blessings innumerable and inestimable, which he hath not in the smallest degree *merited* by his best services; and so long as he is continually making unsuitable returns for former mercies, he cannot, properly speaking, have any *warrant for his faith*, except the word of the gospel; however his *hope* may be encouraged and assured by the seal and witness of the sanctifying Spirit. Nor will the poor publican's prayer be ever laid aside, as unsuitable to his case, by the greatest saint on this side the perfection of heaven: though self-deceivers of various descriptions, may think themselves too *holy* to employ such self-abasing language.

It is commonly urged on this subject, that if any thing be considered as the *warrant* of faith, except the word of the gospel, boasting will be introduced, and self-confidence encouraged. This is true in general, and the

Digitized by Google

nt has a powerful tendency that way: yet many, who are charged *presenting holy dispositions as a necessary warrant to faith in Christ,* on those dispositions to be as entirely a free gift of the Saviour, as any of the blessings they afterwards receive: and (whether consistently or not I pretend not to determine,) they enter as fully as their opponents into the spirit of the apostles words, "By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."—"Who made thee to differ from another?" or "what hast thou that thou hast not received?"—"Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The fact seems to be this: Some pious men, in guarding against abuses, have unwarily thrown impediments in the way of discouraged souls; others by attachment to system have moreover furnished excuses to proud and prejudiced unbelievers; and many have expressed themselves in a manner which may be perverted to encourage a degree and kind of self-preference inconsistent with the pure gospel of Christ. On the other hand, some have incautiously used language on the subject, which may be understood to render even the preaching of regeneration, sanctification, and holiness of life, dangerous; by representing all holy dispositions and good works, as tending to boasting and self-confidence: and the charge of giving countenance to self-righteousness, has been so indiscriminately advanced, as to involve many persons and opinions, that by no means deserve it. But if we adhere simply to the word of God, we shall keep at a distance from these extremes: and none will pervert our doctrine, except those "who stumble at the word, being disobedient," and who "wrest the Scriptures themselves to their own destruction."

PART II.

SAVING FAITH IN CHRIST ESSENTIALLY HOLY IN ITS NATURE.

SECTION I.

The terms Defined and Explained.

THE holy nature of saving faith, at least in its first exercises, has been expressly denied by several persons, who have maintained the doctrine insisted on in the former part of this work; and others have used language capable of this construction: thus the subject has been enveloped in obscurity, and the truth exposed to unmerited objections.

That we may the better understand the subsequent discussion, we should previously obtain precise ideas of the meaning in which the words *holy, holiness, sanctifying,* and *sanctification* are here used. *Holy* or *holiness* is opposed to *unholy* or *unholiness;* and not to *unrighteous* or *unrighteousness.* An *unrighteous man,* in the language of argumentative theology, signifies a man under condemnation for his sins, and not brought into a state of justification; an *unholy man* is one unrenewed by the Spirit of God, and under the dominion of sin. *Holy* and *holiness* therefore relate to the dispositions and affections of his heart, and not to his state as justified before God: nor is

Digitized by Google

this distinction of trivial consequence, but essential to a clear understanding of the subject. Indeed few things have more perplexed religious controversies and discussions, than want of accuracy in speaking of *justification* and *sanctification*, and carefully keeping the ideas of them distinct.

The question, therefore, concerning the holy nature of saving faith, has nothing to do with the doctrine of justification, but belongs entirely to another *topic* in theology. We are "justified freely by the grace of God;" or by *free mercy*, entirely contrary to our deservings: we are justified by the righteousness and atoning blood of Christ, as the meritorious ground of our pardon and title to eternal life: and we are justified by faith alone, because faith alone constitutes our relation to Christ, that we may be "made the righteousness of God in him." According to the holy and good law of our righteous Sovereign, and the covenant of works, the least imperfection or failure in obedience condemns us; all the holiness we can ever possess, with all the obedience we have performed, weighs not an atom in the opposite scale; and to the last moment of life we need free forgiveness of every defect, to whatever degree of sanctification we have attained, or how many good works soever we have done. "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."—Not only the new convert, or the feeble believer in his first actings of faith in Christ, is excluded from taking any encouragement from his *incipient* sanctification, if he be capable of ascertaining its existence: but the most advanced Christian, after half a century spent in holy obedience, and zealous endeavours to glorify the Saviour and serve his generation; comparing himself and his best duties with the perfect standard, must exclaim, "I am all as an unclean thing, and all my righteousness are as filthy rags." Even *perfect* holiness of heart, and obedience in conduct, could do nothing towards atoning for past sins, or redeeming the forfeited inheritance: and if Paul's justification at the tribunal of Christ, depended, as its meritorious ground, on the last expression of his love and zeal, when he was expiring as a martyr, he must be condemned by the holy law of God. From first to last we must be justified by mere mercy and grace, through the righteousness and atoning blood of Emmanuel, and by faith alone: nor can *sanctification* whether more or less advanced, avail any thing towards *justification*. If this was well considered and fully understood, many plausible objections to the *holy nature of saving faith*, which suppose that it interferes with the doctrines of imputed righteousness and free justification, must fall to the ground, and would require no further answer.

"Now to him that worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." These words of the apostle have been greatly misunderstood in this controversy: for it may as fairly be inferred from them, that believers never work at all, for any purpose, or from any motive, as that they are *in all senses absolutely ungodly*, when God justifieth them.—The sinner, when he believes in Christ, "labours for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give him;" he "works out his own salvation with fear and trembling:" he "gives diligence to make his calling and election sure:" he is "zealous of good works," "fruitful in all the works of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God;" yea "always abounding in the work of the Lord." But notwithstanding this, he not only ceases to work, *in respect of justification*, when he first applies for an interest in the righteousness of Christ; but, amidst all his "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end," to glorify God, and to do good to mankind; he never *works at all*, at least *allowedly*, in dependence on his own doings, or in order to add them to "the righteousness of God by faith."

In like manner he is *ungodly*, in himself, according to the law, by his own sincere confession, and in the unerring judgment of God; not only at the moment when he is first justified, but during the whole period that he lived by faith in Christ for justification:—His *incipient and imperfect godliness* is not at all noticed in this respect: yet his coming to Christ with earnest de-

Digitized by Google

sires of salvation, and his humble, obedient, and willing return to God through him, essentially distinguish his character from that of such persons, as say unto God, "depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" and that of all others, who are in every respect absolutely *ungodly*, and have "no fear of God before their eyes."

Whatever in any degree accords to the law of God is so far *holy*; but an *external* or *relative* holiness falls not under our present inquiry. The moral law is *spiritual*, and takes cognizance of men's *spirits*; whatever therefore, in the state of our hearts, answers to the spirituality of the precept, is *holy*. The least intermixture of *unholiness*, in the best and most spiritual exercises of the heart, or actions of the life, condemns us according to the legal covenant: but the actual existence of the smallest portion of a right and spiritual disposition, if it could be ascertained, would prove the possessor *regenerate*; being one of the "things which accompany salvation." Abraham might justly have been condemned, and needed merciful forgiveness for the weakness and wavering of that very faith by which he was justified: while the small measure of obedience which Sarah rendered, in reverencing her husband, though she laughed in unbelief, denied her crime, and was sharply rebuked for it, is noticed with approbation by Peter, as a specimen of the "manner, in which *holy* women who trusted in God adorned themselves." 1 Pet. iii. 6. So entirely distinct are the questions concerning holiness, and concerning the way of justification; except as the sanctification of the Spirit *evidences* our interest in Christ by faith.

The case of Abraham, to which the apostle refers in the words before cited, is peculiarly unfavourable to the conclusions which many deduce from them. For that patriarch had walked with God for many years before the transaction, concerning which the sacred historian records, that "He believed in God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Yet on this passage the apostle grounds his remark, "Now to him who worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is accounted to him for righteousness." But will any man maintain, that Abraham had been, even to that time, in all respects ungodly, and an enemy to God? And that he had never performed one good work in all the preceding years of his walking with God? Yet this must be the consequence of the absolute interpretation of this remarkable text. The same might also be shown respecting David, at the time when he penned the thirty-second Psalm, to which the apostle referred as another illustration of his subject.

Every degree of humilty, fear of God, desire of happiness in his favour and service, love to his perfections and those things which he approves, hatred of what he abhors and forbids; simple belief of his testimony, reliance on his promises, and regard to his authority and glory, if it be *genuine*, accords to the spiritual precept of the law, and is so far *holy*. A transgressor, if renewed to *a right spirit*, and encouraged to hope for mercy, would plead guilty, apply for pardon, and approve of the most humbling and self-denying way of reconciliation, which the glory of his offended God required.

Sanctifying, and *sanctification*, as these words relate to our present subject, denote the *renewal of an unholy creature to a right spirit*; and are applicable to every stage of this renovation, from its commencement in regeneration to its completion in glory.—But no measure of sanctification can possibly form any part of a *sinner's* justifying righteousness: because while it is imperfect, that imperfection needs forgiveness; and when perfected it can make no atonement for past sins, nor can it merit eternal life.—It however distinguishes a *living faith* from that which is *dead* and worthless; it forms our meetness for heaven; it enables us to glorify and prepares us to rejoice in God: and it is a distinct part of our free salvation, no less valuable than justification itself;—as distinct as a gratuitous cure of the jail-fever would be from the pardon of a felony, and the grant of an inheritance. If then the opinion, that saving faith is *holy*, even in its first and feeble actings, could countenance self-righteous confidence; more complete sanctification must

Digitized by Google

have proportionably a still stronger tendency to it. Yet this is not supposed by the persons in question; for they see, that *justification* and *sanctification*, in the *advanced* Christian, are perfectly distinct: how is it then, they do not recollect, that they are distinct at the first, as well as at the last? Or if they allow it, how can they but perceive that their objections in this respect are perfectly unfounded?

SECTION II.

Saving Faith the effect of Regeneration.

The holy nature of saving faith may be inferred from the consideration, that it is the gift of God, and wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit. To this it may indeed be objected, that many gifts are conferred by the same divine Agent, which are allowed to have nothing essentially *holy* in their nature. It should, however, be observed, that in those things which inseparably accompany salvation, the Holy Spirit directly acts upon the dispositions and affections of the heart, stamps his own image, and communicates his own holy nature to the soul, by permanently operating on all its faculties, as an indwelling source of life, light, purity, and felicity; whereas in imparting spiritual gifts, or miraculous powers, he only works upon natural principles, or enables a man *occasionally* to perform supernatural actions, without any abiding union or assimilation. Balaam, Judas, and many who in Christ's name prophesied, cast out devils, and wrought miracles, continued *all the while* covetous, ambitious, malignant, or sensual workers of iniquity: but no man ever truly believed in Christ, while his heart continued the willing slave of any lust.—As these gifts and powers are not holy in their nature, or even in their effects; so neither are they connected with salvation, by any indissoluble bond: but faith in Christ is more explicitly and frequently in Scripture connected with eternal salvation, than any other exercise of the heart or soul whatever. If it therefore be not *holy* in its own nature, it is an exception to the general rule: for no other fruit, or gift, or operation, of the Holy Spirit, that invariably accompanies salvation, can be mentioned, which is not indisputably holy in its essential nature.

As unbelief springs from the "love of darkness rather than light," because the deeds of the unbeliever are evil; so *faith* must arise from the love of light rather than darkness, because of an incipient disposition to keep God's commandments. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his *deeds* may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." When *the evil heart of unbelief* is removed, and the sinner has *received the love of the truth*; then "*with the heart he believeth unto righteousness.*" But in proportion as the doctrines of the gospel are proposed to the minds of proud and carnal men, with convincing energy; they excite the greater measure of scorn, rage and enmity. The overbearing evidence, with which the hated light is poured in upon the reluctant understanding, disturbs and torments the conscience, affronts the self-complacency of the heart, and calls forth into vigorous opposition those evil propensities which before lay dormant. This was the effect of our Lord's discourses and those of his apostles, on the unbelieving priests, scribes, and Pharisees. Undeniable miracles, unanswerable arguments, decisive scriptural proofs, pointed warnings and rebukes, and the clear light of divine truth, connected with the meekness of wisdom and holy love, served but to excite the more determined resistance from their ambition, avarice, envy, and resentment: and when they were completely baffled, and could say nothing against either the miracles or the doctrine, they were enraged even to madness.

Digitized by Google

When a *partial* view of divine truth gains the assent of the understanding, without a disposition of heart congenial to the grand scope of christianity; such professors are formed, as our Lord describes under the similitude of the stony ground: and their fallacious confidence, selfish joy, and temporary faith, while "they have no root in themselves, but in time of temptation fall away," are exemplified by facts on every side.—The seed too sown on thorny ground represents another very common way, in which a carnal heart "holds the truth in unrighteousness," by a dead faith, an unwarrantable confidence, and an awful mistake as to the tendency and design of revealed truth: but *an honest and good heart* is the only *good ground*, in which *the word of the kingdom* will so "take root, and spring up, as to bring forth fruit with patience."

It is really surprising that, with such Scriptures before them, serious and reflecting persons should speak of faith in Christ, as "a mere act of the understanding, produced by a common illumination, totally distinct from regeneration!" I would ask those who use such language, whether this be not precisely the definition of a *dead* faith? and whether any man be capable of giving a better? For is it not an assent of the understanding to the doctrines of the gospel as *true*, without any consent of the heart to them *as good and holy*? It is by no means intended, that all, who inadvertently seem to favour this sentiment, really countenance a dead faith; for many parts of their writings have a contrary tendency: but it shows how readily even *good men*, when contending for a system, may be seduced to sanction opinions which entirely suit the purposes of very *bad men*.

In forming our judgment on this subject, let us next consider the following words of our blessed Saviour; "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:"—"It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God." "Every man therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me.—Therefore said I unto you, No man can come unto me except it were given him of my Father." John vi. 41, 45, 65. *Coming to Christ* is the same as *believing in him*, at least as far as the present argument is concerned: and has this *gift* of the Father, this *drawing, teaching, hearing*, and *learning*, nothing *holy* in its nature? Surely, upon second thoughts, every serious mind will adopt the apostle's words, "Do not err, my beloved brethren; every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning:" especially as the same apostle afterwards carefully distinguishes the wisdom which is from above, by its *holy* and *sanctifying* nature, from that wisdom which is "earthly, sensual, and devilish;" as well as a *living* from a *dead* faith, by the holy obedience that accompanies it. James i. 16, 17; ii. 14—26; iii. 13—18.

But our divine Instructor has not left us to form our own conclusions from this general language: for he hath shown us in what manner the Father teaches and draws the sinner to come to him.—"When the Comforter is come, he shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."—He shall lead you into all truth."—"He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." John xvi. 8, 13. Under the illuminating and convincing influences of the Holy Spirit, sinners become acquainted with their own true character and real situation: and thus the discovery of their guilt, pollution, danger, and helpless misery in themselves, prepares them for perceiving the nature and value of the salvation of Christ. Then he becomes glorious in their eyes, and precious to their hearts: they consider him as the Pearl of great price, yea, of inestimable value. "What things were gain to them, they now count to be loss for Christ." The fear of being rejected by him overpowers all other fears, and is frequently the source of permanent anxiety. The desire of his salvation, and of the felicity which they conceive his people to enjoy, overcomes their love of worldly objects. They are thus prepared to forsake all for Christ: and no important secular interest, no beloved relative, no, not even life itself, is so precious in their deliberate practical judgement as the loving Saviour of lost sinners.

Digitized by Google

In proportion as the Holy Spirit presents the things which pertain to him and his salvation, before one who is thus taught of God and drawn by the Father, all these affections are uniformly excited and invigorated: yet the very same things, when plainly set before the proud and carnal minds of unregenerate sinners, awaken contempt, enmity, and blasphemous rage. And is not that influence, which produces so entire a revolution in the judgment and affections of those who experience it, of an *holy* nature? No doubt, while the truth is made to shine before the sinner's *understanding*, his heart also is prepared to love and welcome it.

This was exemplified on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured from on high, not only on the apostles, but likewise on the multitude. The very persons whom Peter most justly charged with having wickedly crucified the promised Messiah, being "pricked in their heart, said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And being instructed and exhorted by the apostle, "they *gladly received the word*, and were baptized in the name of Jesus." They were convinced of their exceedingly aggravated guilt in crucifying the Lord of glory; and not merely alarmed by the dread of punishment; they "repented and did works meet for repentance:" Christ was glorified in their hearts, and they believed in him as their Lord and Saviour. But there were others who were *cut to the heart* by similar addresses of the apostles: yet, not being humbly sensible of their guilt and danger, they were only the more enraged by their convictions. When Stephen disputed with the Jews, not being able to resist the spirit and wisdom with which he spake, they had recourse to persecution; nay, when his persecutors could neither answer his arguments, nor endure his expostulations, they "gnashed upon him with their teeth, stopped their ears," and stoned him without delay. Now, who can doubt but that they who *gladly received the word*, had experienced a gracious change of heart by the power of the Holy Spirit: while the others, though surrounded with light and tormented with convictions, were left to the natural enmity of their proud and carnal minds? Acts ii. 37, 38; iii. 12—26; iv. 1—4; v. 33; vi. 10, 11; vii. 54—59.

Let us consider another example of the effects produced by these influences. The jailer at Philippi had cruelly abused Paul and Silas, and had exceeded his commission by thrusting them into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks; (for he might have *kept them safely* without all this severity:) and he had afterwards attempted to murder himself. But he was at length convinced, by means of what he heard and saw, that "these were the servants of the most high God, who shewed to men the way of salvation." Under this conviction "he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas:" and, *in the first instance*, before he proposed to them his interesting inquiry, he brought them out of the stocks, and the inner prison, into some convenient place. The event proved that his convictions were produced by the agency of the Holy Spirit: and the jailer's conduct manifested that he was not merely *terrified* but also *humbled*, and sorry for his sins; and, especially, that he heartily repented of the cruel usage which the prisoners had received from him, as he made them all the amends of which the circumstances would then admit. This done, he cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And when they had further instructed him and his family in the nature of Christianity, he embraced that despised and persecuted religion, professed his faith by receiving baptism, ventured all consequences in thus joining himself to the hated sect of the Christians, showed every kindness to Paul and Silas, and was filled with "peace and joy in believing." This is a fair specimen of the *nature* and tendency of these convictions by which sinners are brought to *believe in Christ*. The jailer's faith was evidently connected with repentance, of which he showed some tokens, and produced some fruits, before he understood the plan of salvation revealed in the gospel, and when he had merely a general belief that he might be forgiven and saved. The further and more explicit exercise of

Digitized by Google

faith, when it was fixed on Christ the Saviour; worked by love of him and his servants; overcame the love of the world and the fear of the cross; and purified his heart from the pride, enmity, and selfishness which before had reigned there without control.

But let us contrast this example with that of Felix, a sinner of high rank, before whom Paul, again a prisoner, "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come." For he also *trembled*: but the love of sin caused him to hate the light; and he sent the ambassador of heaven, to the authority of whose message his conscience bore painful testimony, back to the dungeon, saying, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.—But *after two years*, Portius Festus came in Felix's room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."—It does not appear that, before the memorable night of his conversion, the jailer was at all better disposed to Christianity than Felix: they both were *convinced* and *trembled*: but the former was made partaker of *an honest and good heart* by new-creating grace, and the good seed of the word took root, sprang up, and brought forth fruit; while the latter continued carnal, covetous, sensual, and at enmity with God, notwithstanding his transient alarm, when the word of truth was sounding in his ears. Acts xvi. 23—34; xxiv. 24—27.

This may be further illustrated by the case of king Agrippa, who listened to Paul's inimitable defence, and was "almost persuaded to be a Christian:" his understanding assented to the truth, and his conscience was on the part of the Christian Teacher: but his heart remained under the power of worldly principles; and he still neglected Christ and his salvation. But we are told "the Lord *opened the heart* of Lydia, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul." Now, who can doubt but that there was an essential difference between *the heart* which the Lord opened, and that which sin and Satan closed? Acts xvi. 4; xxvi. 28.

Thus the apostle informs us that the "veil still remaineth *on the heart* of the unbelieving Jews;" 2 Cor. iii. 15. and for almost 1800 years they have despised, abhorred, and blasphemed the Messiah, to whom their scriptures so fully bear testimony, and whom their fathers crucified. Yet the Lord hath declared, "I will pour upon them the spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look *to me* whom they have pierced, and mourn." Zech. xii. 10. Then the veil will be taken from their hearts, and they will become penitent believers in the crucified Emmanuel: and who can suppose that this change wrought by the Spirit of grace, by which they are brought to believe in Christ, is any other than regeneration?

Again, the apostle having shown the nature of his ministry, and his manner of fulfilling it, adds these remarkable words, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid unto them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not; lest *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ* should shine into them." And on the other hand, he states that where the gospel is truly believed, "God who commandeth the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into *the heart*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv. Hence it is most manifest that the illumination, which is the immediate *cause of saving faith in Christ*, particularly respects the *heart*, and prepares it for welcoming those discoveries of the divine glory in the person and salvation of Christ, which the proud and carnal heart despises and hates; and which Satan especially hides from those who continue in unbelief. And surely this difference implies that the one is an holy, and the other an unholy state of the affections; the one being regenerate, the other not.

The same is manifestly implied in our Lord's words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God."—"Except he be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the king-

Digitized by Google

dom of God."—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John iii. 1—8. Can any man savingly believe in Christ before he is able in the least degree to perceive the nature of the kingdom of God? And is it not *by faith in Christ* that the sinner enters into that kingdom? Col. i. 13, 14.

St. Paul affirms that "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14. The contrast bewteen the *natural man*, and the *spiritual man*, and indeed the whole context, fully proves, that he spoke of an unregenerate person, one in a state of nature, born of the flesh, and not of the spirit: and would we know what "things of the Spirit of God are foolishness" to such persons; another text from the same epistle informs us; "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." 1 Cor. i. 18. Now can he, to whom the doctrine of a crucified Saviour is foolishness, and who cannot receive or know this doctrine and other truths connected with it, for want of spiritual discernment, be at the same time a true believer in Christ? or does the apostle mean, that this is the case with only some of the unregenerate?

The language of St. John is equally decisive on this subject. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name; which *were*—born of God." John i. 11—13. The concluding words of this passage evidently point out the source of that difference which subsisted between the believing and the unbelieving Jews. The former being *born of God*, received Christ by faith, and were by *adoption* admitted into the family of God, and to all the privileges of his children: the latter, notwithstanding their descent from Abraham, continuing unregenerate, rejected the promised Saviour, and were not owned as the children of God.—I am aware that this text is confidently brought forward in proof, that *faith precedes regeneration;* and in that case it would stand single in Scripture: but a careful consideration of the passage and context is sufficient to evince, that this was by no means the evangelist's design. Christ came to the Jewish nation as his own professing people, and they received him not; but a remnant received him, and were admitted to the privileges of the children of God. This remnant were not distinguished from others, by their descent from the patriarchs, by a more docile and tractable natural disposition, or by the inclination of parents, teachers, or others respecting them; but by a supernatural influence: they were born, not of blood, "nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So that *regeneration* was the immediate cause of their receiving Christ, and believing in his name; and *adoption* into the family of God with all its privileges was the effect. And this accords with the language of the same apostle in another place "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." His faith is the *effect* and evidence of his regeneration, and not the *cause* of it. This is generally allowed to be the order of construction, where he says, "Every one that *loveth* is born of God;" and "Every one that *doeth righteousness* is born of God." And by what rule of interpretation do we reverse it when speaking of *faith*?

He that is *dead in sin* can only have a *dead faith*, and perform *dead works:* for *living faith* can only be predicated of a *living subject*. How then can the dead faith of an unregenerate sinner be the instrumental cause of divine life? But it may be readily understood, that, when the word of truth appears with convincing evidence to the natural understanding, and with alarming energy to the conscience; one man may be left under the power of carnal enmity to resist the light, or to flee from it; while the heart of another, under the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, may be subdued, softened, humbled, and disposed to receive the truth in faith and love. Men who are dead in sin may acquire much doctrinal knowledge, and have a natural conviction that the gospel is true, though their whole religion be a notion and form, with a few transient emotions and affections: but, sometimes even while at a dis-

Digitized by Google

tance from instruction, when in urgent danger, or deep afflictions, "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" takes possession of their souls. Then the truths, before coldly assented to, are recollected and believed in a more cordial manner, and living faith begins to produce all its genuine effects. This change of heart, I apprehend, is called in Scripture, being *born again, born of the Spirit, born of God, begotten of God*, it is *regeneration*, the beginning of sanctification: and the *life* thus communicated, is not merely light in the understanding, but spiritual perception and sensibility in the judgment and conscience, submission in the will, and holy love in the affections, though in a small and feeble measure. "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

The language used concerning those who believed the gospel confirms this conclusion. Thus when Apollos visited Corinth, he "helped them much who had believed *through grace*." The word *grace* may mean, either *the special sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit*, or *unmerited mercy*; and the former seems here to be meant: but if the latter signification be insisted on, St. Paul expounds the passage when he says, "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; by *grace* ye are saved." Eph ii. 4, 5. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy *he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; *that being justified by his grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Tit. iii. 3—7. Now it is evident beyond dispute, that in the judgment of the apostle, as here stated, the first effect of the Lord's special love to those who are dead in sin, and slaves to divers lusts, consists in quickening and regenerating them; and they are *regenerated* that they may be *justified*, by being made capable of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In like manner, when the gospel was preached at Antioch, "the hand of the Lord was with them," (both the teachers and their auditories) "and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." Acts xi. 21. By the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit the dead in sin were made alive to God, and in consequence they believed and turned to the Lord as his worshippers and servants. Here the distinction between *regeneration* and *conversion*, though often treated as *scholastic* and *subtile*, ought to be noted. We are *passive* in receiving divine life, though it *may be* communicated while we are using the appointed means, or bestowing much diligence from natural principles; but we are *active* in turning to the Lord by true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The former is *regeneration*, the latter *conversion*; and it has principally arisen from the disregard of this obvious, and I must add important, distinction (*important* to accurate views and just reasoning in controverted subjects) that many have spoken of *regeneration* as the *effect* instead of the *immediate cause* of faith: for it cannot be denied that conversion, the soul's active turning itself to the Lord, is always the *effect* of faith, in some of its exercises, and generally of explicit faith in Christ: but then regeneration precedes both faith and conversion, as the cause and source of them, in the same manner that life precedes all kinds of vital motion.

"I have planted," says the apostle, "and Apollos watered: but God gave the increase." Surely this proves that no wisdom of words or excellence of speech; no full and faithful declaration of the truth; no clear explanations, conclusive arguments, or apt illustrations; no eloquent addresses to the passions, or solemn appeals to the conscience; no alluring representation of the Saviour's compassion and love; no urgent persuasions or alarming expostulations; no power of truth forcing itself upon the understanding; no undeniable miracles wrought before men's eyes, or even on their persons; no, not

Digitized by Google

even the gift of miracles itself can prevail with an *unregenerate* sinner to welcome the humbling holy salvation of the gospel. His carnal mind will, after all, be "enmity against God:" and as it is not, and cannot be subject to the law; so it will certainly either reject or abuse the gospel, which was expressly intended to "magnify the law and make it honourable." "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea we establish the law." A dead faith, a presumptuous confidence, selfish affections, and formal worship and obedience is the sum total which can be produced without regeneration.

"God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Thus the way of reconciliation was opened. He sent his ambassadors of peace, and by them besought us to be reconciled to God: and thus the way of reconciliation was made manifest. He regenerates our souls; and then we repent, believe, are justified and reconciled, and become the friends of God; and we may adopt these words: "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." Rom. v. 1—11. "You who were *some time* alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet *now* hath he reconciled." Col. i. 21.

The apostle says in one place, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." And in another he states, that "Enoch before his translation had this testimony that *he pleased God*. But without faith it is impossible to please him; for "he that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Rom. viii. 6—9. Heb. xi. 5, 6. Hence it must follow, either that none but the regenerate are capable even of that lowest exercise of true faith, which is here described, or that an unregenerate man may please God. For St. Paul shows what he meant by the expression *in the flesh*, where he subjoined, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you: now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

The proud and carnal enemy of God may tremble, feel temporary pangs of conviction, feign submission, and even yield a forced and unwilling obedience, as Pharaoh did. He may perceive danger, be filled with anguish and horror, and in this state of alarm cry for mercy, and seem willing to accept of it in any way the Lord pleases: but he cannot cordially allow the *justice* of the sentence he would deprecate; and therefore his reliance on *mercy* can be only pretended. He is burdened with *dread of punishment*, but not with a *sense of guilt*; for *guilt* implies the *desert of punishment*: but the person here characterized excuses and palliates his sins, and gives intimations that he thinks the law unreasonably strict and its sentence needlessly severe. You may indeed delineate a character of God suited to the *taste* of his heart, and frame a gospel soothing to his self-love: yet he cannot but be at enmity against an infinitely holy and just God, and his spiritual and perfect law; and the gospel of Christ likewise must be his aversion, unless misrepresented or misunderstood. Even the sense of danger in this case soon wears off, unless it terminate in despair: "There is no fear of God before his eyes." He feels not the load of his sins in a humbling, wearying, and abiding manner. He is spiritually dead, and incapable of spiritual perception and discernment; and regeneration alone can render the heart susceptible of other feelings and affections. But when this change has taken place, in proportion as the new-born babe, by desiring and drinking in "the sincere milk of the word," becomes acquainted with the perfections and commandments of God, and his own character and situation, guilt oppresses his conscience, and permanently burdens his heart, except as the knowledge of the gospel gives him relief. Now he groans and struggles for deliverance: he fears, mourns, prays, and in a confused manner hopes for mercy, even if his acquaintance with the truth be very defective: nor will he ever find rest to his soul till he comes to Christ for it, whatever methods he may try for that purpose. Perhaps the Lord may show him his refuge, as speedily as he discovers his

Digitized by Google

guilt and danger, and in this case he soon has "peace and joy in believing." Nay, it sometimes happens, that a man is taught the nature and glory of the gospel, and the way of salvation which it reveals, even before he has *distinct* and *deep* views of his own exceeding sinfulness; and then all other holy dispositions seem to be subsequent to faith in Christ and a lively hope of salvation; yet in fact that *state* and *feeling* of heart, which disposes us to welcome the true gospel, essentially implies the existence and *incipient* actings of all other gracious affections.

These cases occur most frequently during great revivals of religion, or among those who have been previously well instructed in evangelical truth: but we should be careful not to limit the Lord, when we hear of sudden conversions in other circumstances.—The tree must be known by its fruits.

On other occasions an ignorant or careless trifler, a self-righteous pharisee, a prejudiced heretic, a man rivetted in error by "science, falsely so called," a scoffing infidel, or even a daring blasphemer, is made a partaker of spiritual life; and the Lord sees good to lead him by slow degrees into the knowledge of the truth. He now trembles and hopes alternately; he searches the Scripture, and beseeches God to show him the way of salvation: yet he strives against conviction, and his prejudices exclude the light which shines around him. He acts conscientiously, and obeys in difficult circumstances, from a general belief of God's word, and reliance on his promises; yet he knows but little of the truth, and does not perceive in what way *sinners* may trust in the Lord, and expect promised blessings from him. He tries to establish his own righteousness; but increasing knowledge and spiritual perception frustrate all his attempts, and prolong his uneasiness and remorse. He would fain make some compromise, and retain at least his old foundation: but he is driven from one false refuge after another, till he is ready to give up all hope. He has perhaps long considered the preachers and professors of evangelical truth, as either deluded enthusiasts or artful deceivers; and is therefore cautious to excess. He has been accustomed to regard the doctrine of free salvation as unfavourable to personal holiness; and clearer discoveries of the divine purity and justice increase his assurance that true religion must be practical, and produce obedience and conformity to God; though he has not hitherto understood the sanctifying tendency of the gospel. He feels, however, a powerful attraction to the Saviour, as the centre and rest of his soul, and he imperceptibly verges towards him; though nothing can be more contrary than this to the former disposition and experience of his heart. But at length, after many fluctuations, he is brought to understand and believe the testimony of God concerning his Son, and to perceive the nature, suitableness, and glory of his salvation. Then his difficulties vanish; in admiring and adoring love and gratitude, with Thomas, he acknowledges the Saviour as his Lord and his God, and "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and the blessings he is exalted to bestow.

This is a compendious state of the author's own experience, during the course of about two years, as he has elsewhere more fully related it:* and he cannot doubt but there was *life*, spiritual perception, reverence of God's authority, earnest desires of happiness in his favour and service, longings after holiness, and a general reliance on the divine mercy and faithfulness during that whole period, at some times as vigorous as any he has since experienced. He has likewise met with several others who have been led in a similar way.

The examples of Nicodemus, of Joseph of Arimathea, and even of the apostles themselves, exhibit something of the same kind: for before our Lord's resurrection, none of them seem to have believed *more* concerning him, than many nominal Christians now do; only they *believed with the heart*, and their faith, the effect of regeneration, influenced their practice. Was not Peter

* Force of Truth, an Authentic Narrative.

Digitized by Google

alive to God, when Christ said, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjonas, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my father which is in heaven?" Yet the doctrine of our Lord's crucifixion, which we deem essential to the gospel, was an offence to him as well as to the other apostles. If it be said, "they were under a peculiar dispensation:" let it be also allowed, that others may be under a similar dispensation. The doctrine of the Messiah's expiating the sins of his people, by his sufferings and death, was plainly enough revealed in the Old Testament. John Baptist gave clear intimations of it, John i. 29. and Christ himself frequently taught it: yet the prejudices of his disciples prevented them from receiving it; and he did not see good at once to remove those prejudices. We should scarcely allow any one to be a true believer in Christ, if he did not avow a dependence on his blood for the pardon of sin; yet the foregoing facts demonstrate that *living faith* may exist, in certain circumstances, where this dependence is not exercised.

Cornelius was doubtless regenerate and a partaker of spiritual life, when 'he feared God with all his house, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway:" and when the angel said, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." Yet Peter was sent to "tell him words, whereby he and his house might *be saved*." Perhaps there is no entire *system*, for which men pertinaciously contend, that will in all respects coincide with this example. Acts x. 2—4, 31; xi. 14.

Should it be inquired, what would become of such a man if he should die before he actually believed in Christ? not to insist on the absurdity of the supposition, which implies, that God in *special love* had begun a good work in a sinner's heart, and had been prevented by his death from accomplishing that gracious purpose; I cannot hesitate in answering directly to the point, *that he would certainly go to heaven.* I apprehend, that *whatever comes from the regenerating Spirit of Christ is accepted through the merits and mediation of Christ.*—Infants "being by nature the children of wrath even as others," cannot be meet for heaven without regeneration; yet even when regenerate, they are incapable of explicit faith: though that state of heart is produced, whence faith, as well as every other grace will spring if they live beyond the state of infancy: and as they fell in the first Adam without their own sin, they may doubtless be saved in the second Adam without actually believing in him.

No reflecting and candid person will maintain that this doctrine represents the sinner as bringing something of *his own* to Christ, instead of receiving all from him; for he is not only the way, but the truth and the life also. The rays that precede the rising of the sun, come as certainly from it as those which follow. Christ is exalted not only to pardon and justify the penitent and believing, but likewise to give both repentance and faith. We have naturally no more a *moral* or *spiritual* ability to believe in Christ, than we have to fulfil the whole law; and the life communicated by his Spirit, which disposes and enables us to welcome him, as "made of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," is itself the purchase of his blood, and the fruit of his intercession. "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord;" but he works in a certain order, and makes some of his gifts a preparation for the rest, and regeneration in particular prepares the soul for receiving all other blessings.

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. And this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you." James i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23—25. They who have endeavoured to explain away these texts, which plainly teach, that the word of the gospel is as the seed of regeneration, have deviated from scriptural simplicity; and should we attempt to show *the manner* in which the Holy Spirit uses this word of truth in regenerating the soul, we should fall into a similar fault. We know not what *life* is, or *how* it is communicated. We cannot explain *the manner* in which animals or vegetables are produced according to the

Digitized by Google

course of nature; how then can we comprehend the operation of God in the new creation? Where the truths of the Scripture are preached, or in any way attended to, there sinners are regenerated: where these truths are wholly unknown or disregarded, such effects do not follow. This suffices to direct our conduct; but if we depend on the means, or ascribe the effect to them, we shall be disappointed.

Man is capable of understanding, remembering, reflecting, hoping, fearing, and all other exercises of an intelligent mind, even while destitute of *spiritual* perception. The word of God is addressed to his understanding, heart, and conscience: and in general, even when it obtains the assent of the understanding, and the conscience is disquieted, the heart revolts, and in one way or other, manifests its aversion. But in some instances this aversion is overcome, nay, a state of the affections diametrically opposite takes place; and it is evidently scriptural to ascribe this change to regenerating grace, though we cannot explain the manner in which the Holy Spirit uses divine truth to effect it; or determine how far that faith, of which *natural* men are capable, may in some cases be rendered subservient to it. It is however, necessary to observe, that the Scriptures no where give the least intimation of our being *regenerated* by faith, though it will be shown in the sequel that we are *sanctified* by faith.

Adam, created after the image of God in holiness, was capable of *changing*, and becoming unholy, *without any positive divine interposition*. Satan's insinuations, therefore, *might*, when believed, produce *by their own efficacy* his image in the soul: yet surely man had begun to fall at the moment when he favourably listened to the temptation; and his *belief* of Satan's lies was *wicked* in itself, as well as the principle of his subsequent wickedness. But fallen man has no *natural* disposition to believe the holy truth of God: the progress therefore of sanctification may be ascribed to the energy of *faith*, by which the Spirit carries on his work of renovation: but the disposition so to believe, as to be influenced by faith to holy obedience, must itself be the effect of special grace, and the beginning of the sinner's recovery from his fallen state. So that the argument, taken from the way in which Adam fell, to prove that faith precedes regeneration, is grounded on an evident misapprehension.

Under the notion that *faith precedes and is the subordinate cause of regeneration*, schemes are formed concerning the best manner of preaching, and the subjects principally to be insisted on in order to produce this active principle in the hearts of unregenerate men! And those parts of Scripture are commonly preferred, which speak most fully of evangelical subjects; under the persuasion that a favourable opinion of the divine character, and an encouraging hope of mercy, have a tendency to produce a right temper of mind, and to reconcile the heart to God! But surely this arises from inattention to the testimony of the apostle, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." For this most certainly means, that the heart of unregenerate men is averse to the *real character* of God; and not to a *mistaken notion* concerning him, as these devices seem to suppose. The *unholy* heart irreconcilably hates the holy perfections of the Lord, and whatever bears the stamp of his holiness; and cannot possibly be pleased with a holy gospel, and nothing short of a total perversion of the truth can satisfy it. Hence unscriptural systems are devised and propagated: for if the infinite justice and holiness of God, and his determination to take vengeance on all the workers of iniquity, be kept out of sight; if his holy law be either misrepresented as to its demands and sanction, or spoken of as unreasonably strict and severe: and if the gospel be considered as a kind of compensation for the rigour of the law, that it might be dispensed with and set aside, instead of being honoured and established?—then unregenerate sinners may be persuaded to embrace the system, to presume on God's mercy, and experience a variety of high, selfish, and transient affections. They will however continue unregenerate, and as much at enmity with the holy character, law, gospel, and service of the one, living, and true God, as ever: and more scriptural views of these sub-

Digitized by Google

jects will most certainly and effectually destroy all their apparently good frames, and call forth all the latent enmity and rebellion of the heart, which were merely soothed and humoured, instead of being dethroned and crucified. So indispensably necessary is regeneration to a real belief of the uncorrupted gospel of Christ.

"I was," says the apostle, "alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." "I *through the law* am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." In general, the preaching of the holy law of God, in its spirituality, extent, excellency, and awful sanction, is the method which is most blessed to bring sinners to renounce every kind of self-confidence, and to feel their need of Christ and his salvation: but that *moral* preaching, which is commonly called *legal*, is widely different both in its nature and tendency. It by no means exhibits the awful, perfect, and glorious law of God, "the ministration of condemnation," to honour which, the eternal Son of the Father became incarnate, and was obedient even unto the death upon the cross: but on the contrary it calls men to practise duties, according to a scanty, imperfect, and indeterminate rule; which consequently leads to self-complacency and contempt of the gospel. Let any man thoroughly preach the holy law of God, with close application to the conscience, and a fair declaration of the sinner's condition according to it; and if he do not discover and preach the gospel too, he will soon despair himself, and drive all who continue to regard him to despair likewise.

Sometimes, however, the Holy Spirit leads the sinner at once to the cross of Christ, and in that single object shows him both his guilt and his redemption. Here he learns the glory of the law itself, with the evil and desert of transgression: but he cannot thus learn all *the particular requirements* of the law, or clearly discover in what respect he needs repentance, forgiveness, and divine grace to enable him to "walk in newness of life." The whole word of God should therefore be preached, and his whole counsel declared, in proportion as the minister is enabled to get acquainted with it, and as the people are able to receive it; and then the Lord will bless what part of truth he sees good. But neither law nor gospel, precepts nor doctrines, threatenings nor promises, will change men's hearts or produce true faith, without the life-giving power of the Spirit. The same view of the divine perfections and government is set before us in every part of Scripture; and facts prove, that sometimes one part and sometimes another, are first made effectual to impress the minds of sinners with salutary conviction.

It is argued, that *faith in Christ* must precede regeneration, because spiritual life springs from union with Christ, and faith is the principle of our union with him. But I apprehend that this argument rests on no solid ground. The Holy Spirit is the *Life*, or *animating Soul*, of that Body of which Christ is the Head. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus quickens the dead in sin: thus they are made alive to God, and by this *uniting Cause and Agent* they become Spiritually one with Christ, as living by his life, frequently even before they have explicit knowledge of him. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." We become alive to God, not by our apprehending Christ, but by his apprehending us: and in consequence we are brought to believe in his name. So that living faith in Christ is the *effect* and not the *cause* of our union with him; if we would speak of the subject in an exact argumentative manner.—Faith constitutes our *relation* to Christ, as "made the righteousness of God in him:" and till we are conscious of explicitly believing in him, we cannot know, or warrantably take any comfort from an union with him: and as this is the case, we generally speak of faith as uniting us to Christ, when discoursing in a popular style. But surely this is a feeble foundation on which to rest a conclusion, that is evidently repugnant to the constant tenor of Scripture! "*Of Him* are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption." According to these words

Digitized by Google

of the apostle, even the wisdom, by which we count all but loss for Christ, was derived from Christ by the grace of that Spirit, by whom we are baptized into him, and are One with him. Who then can think, with these words before his mind, that the faith of an unregenerate sinner is the uniting principle between Christ and his soul?

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." This and similar texts evidently refer, not to regeneration, but to that holy joy and confidence in God as a Father, by which "the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God:" and which are connected with the lively exercise of all other filial affections. It will hardly be maintained that we are *actually* the children of God while unregenerate, whatever may have been the secret purposes or *predestination* of God respecting our future adoption: but we must be the children of God *in very deed*, when the Spirit of adoption witnesses that we are so; for he bears witness to nothing but the truth. Indeed the expression, "*Because ye are sons*," clearly marks this distinction: and our Lord confirms this when he says to his disciples, "If ye love me keep my commandments; and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." John xiv. 15—18. The apostles were certainly *regenerate* when these words were addressed to them, as the supposition of their *loving Christ and keeping his commandments* most clearly proves: yet the promise evidently referred to the holy consolations of the Spirit, and not to his miraculous powers. This may suffice to show, that the Scriptures, which mention the Spirit of *adoption*, as given subsequent to faith, being the *witness, seal, earnest*, and *first-fruits*, of our blessedness as the children of God, not at all relating to regeneration, prove nothing against the doctrine maintained in this part of our subject.

The Scriptures indeed speak of those who believe not in Christ, as being under wrath and dead in sin: but these declarations are *general* truths, which must be explained by the constant tenor of holy writ. If any person persist in rejecting Christ and his salvation, after a fair opportunity of hearing the gospel, he is no doubt dead in sin, and the wrath of God abideth on him.

But supposing the Bible put into any person's hand, along with the evidence of its being a divine revelation, no warranted conclusion can be drawn as to the state of his mind, while he is employed in diligently examining the subject; or till it appear whether he is disposed to welcome, or reject the salvation of Christ. Even when a man is convinced that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and disposed to believe the record of God which they contain, some time will be requisite for him to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus," in order that he may explicitly believe in him; unless he be taught by immediate inspiration, and not by the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit accompanying the diligent use of instituted means. Should the gospel be heard with the docility of a little child, the hearer must have time to compare the instructions of the preacher with the infallible standard of divine truth, that he may "know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether men speak of themselves." This was the conduct of the Bereans, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Therefore many of them believed. Their attention, teachableness, impartiality, diligence, and willingness to be determined by the oracles of God, constituted the *honest and good heart*, which suits the good word of the kingdom; and this essentially distinguished them from prejudiced and obstinate despisers and persecutors of the apostles, who persisted in contradicting and blaspheming.

The Lord finds his people in different situations and of widely dissimilar characters; and he leads them in a vast variety of ways: but he brings them all in his appointed time to count all things but loss that they may win Christ. So long, therefore, as men neglect this great salvation, we must continue to warn them, that "he who believeth not the Son of God shall

Digitized by Google

not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him." In popular addresses it is by no means expedient to make many distinctions, exceptions, or limitations; yet it is of great consequence that the public teachers of religion should themselves be familiarly acquainted with such distinctions as are important: and then they will so propose the simplest general truths as not to contradict the deepest parts of heavenly wisdom; which "are strong meat, belonging to those that are of age, even such as by reason of age have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Nay, "if men (as one well observes,) will distinguish ill, they must be opposed by those who distinguish better, and not by such as do not distinguish at all." If any one should attempt to expound certain precepts of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in an unqualified and unlimited sense, and to deduce the utmost practical consequences from them; every solid divine would protest against such a mode of interpretation, show it to be contradictory to other parts of Scripture, and justly remark that those exceptions and restrictions must be admitted, which common sense could not fail to suggest, and which needed not be particularized in a public discourse. And ought not the same rules of interpretation to be adopted, when declarations, such as these which we are now considering, are made in a general manner? Certainly they ought; otherwise the Scriptures must perpetually appear to be in opposition to themselves. And when thus explained, they are not in the least repugnant to the proposition, that true faith is always the effect of regeneration.

There may be a vital spark, or a dawning ray, where nothing but darkness and death are discernible by us; and we should remember, to copy him, who "will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed."—For "the path of the just is like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." A ray of light breaks in upon the previous reign of entire darkness, and imperceptibly diminishes the gloom: but coming from the sun, it indicates his approach, and will continue to advance till it arrive at the full blaze of noon. "On you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings." "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning." "If any man *will do the will of God*, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths, which they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." These and similar passages in Scripture naturally lead us to consider the work of God, in drawing the sinner unto himself, by Christ the living Way, in many instances at least, as very gradual; and they by no means can be made even to appear consistent with the opinion, that a man continues absolutely dead in sin, till after he has come to Christ, and has explicit knowledge of him, and faith in him; or even, as some state it, a full assurance of an interest in his salvation.

The new-born infant instinctively craves the milk of the breast, though incapable of understanding the nature of its wants and desires: but various circumstances may retard its actual satisfaction in the wholesome nutriment provided for it. Thus the new-born babe, in the spiritual world, feels a strong desire after the sincere milk of the word, yet often scarcely knows what he wants or seeks for: but the salvation of Christ alone can satisfy these new desires which he experiences; and whatever may hinder his progress, he will still continue uneasy and inquiring, till brought to live explicitly by faith in the Son of God. Then he will seek no further, except to secure and enjoy the satisfying blessings he has discovered.

And now let the reader seriously and impartially consider these several arguments, and endeavour to estimate their collective force: after which, let us determine, whether it has not been completely proved, that, according to the word of God, *saving faith is always the effect of regeneration*; and consequently that it is *holy* in its nature, as well as in its fruits.

Digitized by Google

SECTION III.

Saving Faith always accompanied by other things essentially holy.

ANOTHER most conclusive argument to prove the *holy* nature of faith, may be deduced from the other *holy* exercises of the heart with which it is inseparably connected.

No man ever yet truly believed in Christ, without some measure of *humiliation for sin*; and where this is totally wanting, a professed believer can at most rank no higher than a stony-ground hearer, *who has no root in himself*; in whatever manner slavish terrors have been succeeded by selfish comforts. But when a careless sinner, or a proud despiser of the gospel, is brought with down-cast eyes, to smite on his breast, and from his inmost soul to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" he certainly thus far manifests *a right spirit*.—In the parable here alluded to, the question is not, what the Pharisee *proudly* assumed concerning his own sanctity; or what the publican *humbly* confessed of his own sinfulness; but whether the humble confession of the one was not *intrinsically better*, than the proud boastings of the other? And whether the publican's self-abasing cry for mercy was not an exercise of *true holiness*?—That it sprang from humility and contrition, and was not extorted by mere terror, our Lord himself testifies; "I tell you, that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that *humbleth himself* shall be exalted." Luke xviii. 14. And this testimony ought to be decisive: for it evidently proves that genuine humility inseparably attends on justifying faith, even in its feeblest and most discouraged applications for pardoning mercy.

The Pharisee did not arrogate the honour of making himself to differ from other men; at least the words ascribed to him imply the contrary: and indeed the same is observable in the language of many who are notorious for spiritual pride. But he presumptuously deemed himself eminent in holiness, when he was altogether unholy; and established in the full favour of God, from which he was entirely estranged. If a man say, "God, I thank thee for giving me humility, repentance, and newness of heart;" and then rely on these supposed endowments as the meritorious ground of his justification; let him be classed with the Pharisee: but surely we may *know* that God hath given us these holy dispositions, and that "by his grace we are what we are," and heartily thank him for his special love in thus making us to differ, without in the least "trusting to our own righteousness, and despising others." Or else the most eminent believers, both of the Old and New Testament, must be joined with us under this condemnation. In whatever measure we have experienced "the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience," we shall not, if properly instructed, depend on it in the smallest degree for justification: and if this be the case of the most eminent saint on earth, why should it be supposed, that the least conceivable spark of true holiness, even when *not discerned*, must lead the new convert to a self-righteous confidence, and indispose him to seek the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ?

Saul of Tarsus, when a proud Pharisee, expressed the most contemptuous enmity against the holy Jesus, and "breathed out threatenings and slaughter" against his harmless disciples. But view this same person, prostrate on the ground, trembling with apprehensions of *merited* vengeance, supplicating undeserved mercy, and saying to the Saviour, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" Then observe him, when "what things *were gain to him*, these he counted loss for Christ;" and determine whether no degree of genuine humiliation was connected with his first exercises of faith in the Son of God.

Digitized by Google

But if we carefully examine the language of Scripture, we must be convinced, that *humility* is a radical and most important part of holiness; and especially that humiliation for sin is essential to the existence of holiness in the heart of a fallen creature.—"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "God resisteth the proud, and giveth his grace unto the humble." Nay, a great part of the holiness of redeemed sinners, even in heaven, seems to consist in a disposition to ascribe all their salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain; and in feeling and acting consistently with the recollection of their own deep guilt, and their inexpressible obligations to the special mercy and love of the Redeemer. Indeed if pride were the first sin of apostate spirits, humility must be most essential to the holiness even of angels.

The degree of genuine humility, connected with the sinner's first actings of faith in Christ, may be very small: but will any Christian say, that there is absolutely none at all? Or that pride is at that moment in full dominion? Can a sinner embrace the salvation of Christ in a cordial manner, without the least disposition to abase and condemn himself? Can he, when merely alarmed by the dread of a punishment which he does not allow that he deserves, sincerely seek the deliverance from free unmerited mercy? Can he sincerely seek this mercy, in the most humiliating way imaginable, without the least degree of humiliation? And if his *professed* reliance on the free grace through Immanuel's atoning blood, be *insincere*, will a heart-searching God justify him on account of a hypocritical pretension? "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity, and *in whose spirit there is no guile.*"

In a word, it has often been said, and it never has been disproved, that "there can be no more *mercy* in the sinner's salvation, than there was *justice* in his condemnation:" it is therefore absolutely impossible for any one cordially to welcome salvation altogether of *mere mercy*, unless he sincerely *allow* that he might *justly* have been left under condemnation.

Again, did our Lord, in the parable of the prodigal son, design to represent the returning sinner as driven merely by distress to seek deliverance from God? What did he then mean by the expression, *When he came to himself?*—The prodigal is supposed to have felt his *misery* before, (as devils and damned spirits do, with proud and determined alienation of heart from his father, and the rules of his family: but "when he came to himself," he awaked as out of sleep, he recovered as from intoxication, he was restored as from insanity; and then he became sensible of his sin and folly. Other thoughts now arise in his mind concerning his father's character, authority, and conduct; and his own past behaviour and present situation: and he breaks out into this exclamation, "How many of my father's servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father; and will say unto him, Father, I have *sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*" Are not these expressions of sorrow and humiliation for sin, and of deep self-abasement? No extenuation of excuse is so much as thought of by the self-condemned penitent; but he deduces his whole encouragement to return home, from the known kindness and compassion of his offended father. Thus is he represented as resolving to return home, from right principles, and in a right spirit: and when welcomed with immense kindness, and without any upbraidings, by his loving parent, he alters not the terms of his intended confession, except by leaving out the concluding words, as superseded by the undeserved and unexpected reception he met with. As this parable was purposely named by our Lord, to illustrate the dealings of our merciful God towards the vilest of sinners, who come to him in his appointed way, it is absolutely decisive, that he considered godly sorrow, humiliation, and unreserved confession of guilt, as never-failing attendants on saving faith. Luke xv. And the arrangement of the parable contains a demonstration, that regeneration is at all times antecedent to faith, as the cause is antecedent to the effect.

Digitized by Google

Every serious student of the Scriptures must have observed, that they always represent repentance and faith as inseparably connected. It is not indeed worth while formally to dispute, which of these twin-graces is first exercised by the newly regenerated sinner: a belief of some divine truths may show him his need of repentance; and some degree of a penitent disposition may render him sensible that he wants an interest in Christ's salvation by faith in his name. It suffices to say, that true repentance is a *believing repentance*, and true faith is a *penitent faith*.—A general belief of God's mercy and readiness to forgive, seems essential to genuine repentance; but more explicit views of the way in which mercy is vouchsafed, are not always requisite: yet repentance is doubtless rendered more deep, spiritual, and ingenuous, in proportion as the glory of the gospel is understood, and its consolations experienced.—We ought not, however, to overlook, much less to invert, the order in which the inspired writers mention repentance and faith. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Repent ye and believe the gospel." "Repent and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out.*" "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."—"If peradventure God will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

If it please God to give repentance to an opposer of his gospel, he will then acknowledge the truth, believe in Christ, and be saved: but if God do not give him repentance, he will continue an unbeliever held fast in the snare of the devil. This at least completely proves, that true repentance always accompanies the first actings of saving faith. And a man's views must certainly be unscriptural, when he cannot support them without inverting or altering the language of inspiration.

The word translated *repentance* denotes *a change of mind:* but surely no Christian will deliberately maintain, that this change takes place only in the *understanding*, without at all influencing the will and *affections!* Or that it is merely a change of opinion about the doctrine of justification! Yet incautious expressions to that effect are not uncommon. We read however not only of "*an evil heart of unbelief* in departing from the living God;" but also of an hard and *impenitent heart*, "through which sinners treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath." So that, beyond all dispute, the change of mind, which is called *repentance*, peculiarly relates to the *heart*, without which every change of opinion can at most only amount to a *dead faith* and *a form of knowledge*. True repentance implies an entire revolution in a man's views and judgment respecting himself, and every thing to which he stands related, and in all his corresponding dispositions and affections. But though this internal change be especially denoted by the word thus translated; yet when the term is used in a popular sense, and as distinguished from *regeneration*, it includes fear of divine wrath, godly sorrow, humiliation, hatred of sin and all its pleasures and profits, forsaking sin, turning to God with ingenuous confession and cries for mercy, and entering on a new course of life. It is needless in this place to enter further on the subject, as the public has long been in possession of the author's deliberate thoughts upon it;* but if any man doubt of what has been here advanced, let him carefully and impartially consider the scriptures referred to, with the several contexts, and I apprehend he will find it impossible to resist conviction. Job xlii. 6. Jer. xxxii. 19. Ezek. xviii. 28. Matt. iii. 8—10. xxi. 29—32. Luke xv. 10, 17, 21. 2 Cor. vii. 9—11. In the last passage referred to, the apostle speaks of *godly sorrow as preceding, and working "repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of:"* surely then no repentance is saving or genuine which is unconnected with godly sorrow!

Repentance is both the *command* and the *gift* of God. It is our duty; but without divine grace we are wholly indisposed to perform it: and in this res-

* Discourse on Repentance.

Digitized by Google

pect it resembles all other duties, each of which is the subject of promises as well as of precepts; and none of them are performed in the right manner, except as the Lord gives us *a new heart and a new spirit.* "God (by the gospel) commandeth all men every where to repent." "Jesus is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins." Repentance belongs entirely to the gospel and to the covenant of grace; and has nothing to do with the law and the covenant of works, except in our being grieved and humbled at heart for violating them, and in our humbly confessing that we deserve that wrath of God which is denounced against every transgressor.—The gospel alone gives the call to repentance, the encouragement to repentance, and the grace of repentance: it is therefore most astonishing that the preaching of repentance should have ever been called *legal*, or thought inconsistent with the free grace of the gospel! Or that repentance should ever have been almost excluded from the list of evangelical graces, the constituent parts of true holiness.

But, says our Lord "What think ye? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go Sir, and went not.—Verily I say unto you, the publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before you.—For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, *repented not afterwards, that ye might believe.*" Hence we learn that the general belief of John's testimony brought the publicans and harlots to repentance, and this repentance, prepared them for admission into the Messiah's kingdom by faith in him; and if the Pharisees had repented of their sin, in rejecting the ministry of John, their repentance would have been connected with the same faith in him to whom John bare testimony. Indeed the office of John Baptist, in preparing the way of the Lord, as the herald of the Saviour to proclaim his appearance and introduce his gospel, is peculiarly important in this argument.—He first called sinners to repentance, showed the Jews in general the fallaciousness of trusting in their national privileges, and the Pharisees in particular the emptiness of their forms and external services; he used the proper means of convincing all sorts of persons of their guilt and danger; and then pointed out to them "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" "the Son of God," who "baptizeth with the Holy Ghost:" concluding with this solemn declaration and warning "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not on the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him." John iii. 35, 36. And his whole ministry undeniably proves, both that genuine repentance is always connected with saving faith; and that it is an important part of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

This appears also in a very convincing manner in the singular example of the penitent thief, who upon the cross *humbly* acknowledged, that he deserved his ignominious and torturing death; while he believed in the Saviour suspended beside him, for the salvation of his soul from future condemnation. Was there no essential difference in the frame of his spirit, from that of the other thief, who in the agonies of death, joined the multitude in reviling the holy Jesus? Did this difference arise from any other cause than regeneration? And was not he a partaker of true holiness?

Confession of sin, an essential part of true repentance, is every where represented as inseparable from saving faith, and *preparatory to forgiveness.* "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them, shall obtain mercy." Prov. xxviii. 13. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John i. 8, 9. "I acknowledged my sin unto thee,

Digitized by Google

and mine iniquity have I not hid.—I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Ps. xxxii. 5. "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; *for I acknowledge my transgressions*, and my sin is ever before me." Ps. li. 1—5. The publican, the prodigal son, the thief upon the cross, and other instances already adduced, exemplify this ingenuous unreserved confession of their sinfulness: nor is there a single case in Scripture, real or parabolical, of a sinner acceptably applying to God for pardoning mercy, in which this disposition to glorify him, by a full and free confession is not implied or expressed. "He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light." Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

No doubt this (as well as all other holy dispositions) may be counterfeited; and the appearance of humility assumed where the heart remains unhumbled. Thus Pharaoh, Judas, and several others, confessed their sins in a partial, extorted, and reluctant manner. Yet no doubt, if genuine, it implies a *right spirit*; the proper frame of mind, in which a sinner ought to appear before his offended Lord, being exactly the reverse to a proud self-justifying disposition. He who ingenuously confesses his sins, gives unto God the honour both of his justice and of his mercy; he expresses approbation both of the holy law and of the blessed gospel; he willingly submits to God's righteousness, and is prepared to welcome a free salvation; he adores the grace, which "hath abounded towards us, in all wisdom and prudence," and glorifies the Lord, as "*just*, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

"His name," says the angel, "shall be called Jesus; because he shall save his people *from their sins*." "God, having raised up his Son Jesus," says the apostle "hath sent him to bless you, *in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*." "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works." Now let a reflecting person seriously ask himself, whether any one can truly believe in Christ, without in the least understanding this part of his salvation, or desiring the principal blessing which he confers on his people? Can he desire salvation from sin, without the least hatred of sin or love of holiness; Or can there be any hatred of sin and love of holiness in a heart that is entirely unholy?—The views of a newly awakened sinner may be extremely confused, and the fear of wrath with desires of deliverance from it, may greatly preponderate in his experience: nor should this be condemned as *mere selfishness*, while salvation from deserved punishment is sought from God's mercy in his appointed way; for even this is directly contrary to our natural pride and enmity to God; and the desire of happiness is as strong in an holy as in an unholy creature. Indeed the sinner himself in his first application for mercy, may not, during the anxious trepidation of his heart, perceive any thing more than a desire of forgiveness and happiness in the favour of God: yet in reality, every acting of true faith in Christ is connected with some degree of a desire to be delivered from sin, and to be made holy; which will appear to the intelligent observer, in that tenderness of conscience, and dread of relapsing into former evil ways, which are manifested by convinced sinners, in their deepest distress, and which often help the judicious pastor to discriminate between those convictions which arise from spiritual illamination, and the terrors which spring from merely natural principles.

Indeed they, who are well versed in doctrinal discussions, may feel *a kind of wish* after sanctification, without any hatred of sin or love of holiness, from a conviction that they cannot be saved unless they be sanctified: and thus the common saying, "*the desire of grace is grace*," should be used with caution, or it may aid the enemy to deceive men's souls.—But persons of this description will not sincerely apply to Christ for any part of this salvation, or diligently use the proper means of seeking it. "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath not: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." Prov. xiii. 4.

Digitized by Google

When our Lord invites "the weary and heavy laden to come unto him, that they might find rest to their souls;" he adds, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." He declares that he will treat all those as enemies, "who will not have him to reign over them:" and every scriptural call to sinners *implies* the same instruction. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, *and he will have mercy on him;* and to our God, and *he will abundantly pardon.*" Isaiah lv. 6, 7. Certainly the evangelical prophet had no idea of *forgiveness and the comfort of it, preceding* every degree of true repentance and all the works meet for repentance, according to the doctrine maintained by some modern teachers of free salvation. With these Scriptures before us, can we maintain, that any one truly returns to the Lord, by Christ the living Way, and by faith in him, who does not so much as desire salvation *from his sins*, and renewal unto holiness? And is not a sincere and hearty desire of these blessings itself a genuine part of holiness?

It has been shown, that humility, repentance, hatred of sin, with sincere desires to be saved from it, and a willing submission to Christ as our King, are inseparably connected with every exercise of genuine faith in him: and doubtless all these are branches of true holiness. The same also may be observed concerning the genuine spirit of prayer, which has properly been considered as the very breath of faith, and one of the first symptoms of spiritual life. A person at a distance from the means of clear instruction, or perplexed in attempting to distinguish truth from falsehood, may sincerely pray for divine teaching, and other spiritual blessings, from a general knowledge and feeling of his wants, and a belief of some revealed truths, even previously to *explicit faith in Christ:* and thus he may be further enlightened as to the nature and glory of the gospel, and have the way of God expounded to him more perfectly. Acts xviii. 24—28. But it cannot be conceived, that any one *has believed* in Christ, and been even justified by faith in him; while he has never yet in his heart presented a single sincere petition for spiritual blessings!—Indeed the application of the soul to Christ for salvation seems to be essentially *prayer*, mental prayer, and as inseparable from it, as the motion of the lungs from the act of breathing, or that of the heart from pulsation. True Christians are frequently in the New Testament distinguished as "those who call on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and it is said, "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him: for whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?" Rom. x. 10—14. It is allowed that no one can call on the Lord Jesus, before he has some degree of faith in him: but at the same time, these testimonies of the Scripture prove, that the spirit of prayer inseparably accompanies every exercise of faith from first to last. Else what is the nature of faith? Is it merely assent and inactive reliance? Or is it the soul going forth with fervent desires after the mercy and grace, of which the urgent want is felt, to him whom it believes able and willing to deliver, to help, and to save? If this latter be the acting of faith in Christ, what is the *medium* of the soul's application to him, except the lifting up of the heart in desire and expectation? and this is the essence of Prayer. Hence it is that salvation is so closely joined with prayer in many places in Scripture. "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that *call upon thee.*" Ps. lxxxvi. 1—7. "Ask and it shall be given you:—Every one that asketh receiveth." "Let us come boldly to the throne of Grace, that we *may obtain mercy*, and find grace to help in time of need."—"All that call on the Lord shall be saved." According to these promises, it is as impossible a man should truly pray, and yet not be saved, as that he should truly believe, and not be saved; because genuine faith and prayer are inseparable.

Men may read, repeat, or even frame prayers, in a formal manner, without the least degree of real holiness. They may *sincerely* ask for tempora

Digitized by Google

things, "that they may consume them on their lusts;" or for deliverance from temporal calamities and dangers. They may even pray heartily to be saved from future punishment, and to be made for ever happy, according to their own notions of felicity, without any idea of what happiness consists in. But genuine prayer is the language of humility, and of spiritual desires and expectations: it is the expression of conscious indigence, dependence, and unworthiness; and of hearty longings after those blessings, which God alone can bestow, and which can only be enjoyed in his favour and presence. "Lord, thou has heard the desire of *the humble*; thou *wilt prepare their heart*; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ps. x. 17. Hence we read of "praying in," or *by*, "the Spirit;" "praying in the Holy Ghost," and "worshipping in spirit and truth." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but *the prayer of the upright is his delight*." Prov. xv. 8. Saul when a Pharisee, may be supposed to have made long prayers: but these were doubtless very different from the earnest supplications which he poured out before the Lord at Damascus, and which were thus noticed, "For behold he prayeth." Can it be conceived, that a holy God *delighteth* in any prayer, which hath nothing *holy* in its nature? Yet the *humble* supplicants, who are most acceptable to him, are most apt to be dissatisfied with themselves, and even to question the *sincerity* and *uprightness* of their earnest and fervent prayers.

The case of Manasseh may illustrate this subject; for none of those, who enter into the spirit and importance of this discussion, will deny that he found mercy by faith in the promised Saviour. The first intimation of any thing hopeful in his case is thus given: "When he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and *humbled himself* greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication." In the subsequent narrative, *his prayer* is repeatedly mentioned; and his sins *before he was humbled* are strikingly contrasted with his subsequent conduct. 2 Chron. xxxiii. Hence I apprehend, we may infer with certainty, that acceptable prayer and genuine humiliation always accompany saving faith. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise."

If then humility, godly sorrow, hatred of all evil, ingenuous confession, and whatever else belongs to true repentance, with upright desires after salvation from sin, and spiritual prayer, do indeed invariably attend every acting of faith in Christ; that faith must be a *holy exercise of a regenerate soul*; for surely none will maintain, that there is not the least symptom of spiritual life, the smallest degree of holiness, in any of these, or in all of them united! On the other hand, it can scarcely be imagined, that any will deliberately persist in maintaining, that justifying faith so precedes all humiliation, and other spiritual affections, as to be wholly unconnected with them; and that a man is actually justified and at peace with God, before he at all begins to humble himself, be sorry for his sins, to confess and hate them, or to pray for spiritual blessings! This would invert the whole order of Scripture, and can never be *directly and consistently avowed* by a candid and serious disciple of the Lord Jesus; however he may be led, upon a controversial subject, to drop expressions, make statements, or adopt sentiments, which *fairly* admit of such an interpretation.—But in fact, the grand difficulty consists in prevailing with men, so far to examine their preconceived opinions, and to question the truth of them, as to bestow the pains requisite for duly weighing the force of those arguments, which from Scripture are brought against them; and either solidly to refute them, at least so as to satisfy their own minds, or candidly to acknowledge that they were mistaken.

Digitized by Google

SECTION IV.

The Holy Nature of Faith more directly shown.

THE holiness of saving faith may not only be inferred from its Author, its source, and its concomitants; but likewise from a careful consideration of its peculiar nature.

The apostle exhorts Christians to "build up themselves in their *most holy faith.*" Jude 20. Should it be urged, that he meant *the doctrine* of faith, and not *faith* itself; we inquire, how *a most holy doctrine* can be received in a right manner by *a faith not at all holy?* We read of those who "held" (or *imprisoned*) "the truth in unrighteousness;"—"because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge:" Rom. i. 18—28. and if this were the effect of man's carnal enmity against God, in respect of those truths which are discoverable by reason; what must be the opposition of the same principle to the offensive message of the gospel?—When the assent of the understanding is compelled, by invincible evidence to the *real* doctrine of the cross, the most determined resistance is excited: but in general men contrive to cast a shade over that part of truth which most offends them: and by an abuse of the other parts, they stifle their convictions, and quiet themselves in a worldly course of life. This is especially effected by partial and unscriptural views of the gospel; and thus may evangelical professors "hold the truth in unrighteousness," in the most awful sense imaginable.

Christianity, as stated in the Scriptures, displays the glorious justice and holiness of God, in connexion with the odiousness and desert of sin, and the sinner's tremendous danger of everlasting misery, more clearly than any other discovery ever made of the divine perfections and government; though in harmony with the most endearing and encouraging displays of love and mercy to the vilest of sinners. But if every thing be kept out of sight, or very slightly noticed, except the displays of infinite and everlasting love and mercy; unregenerate men may embrace this *mutilated* gospel with an *unholy* faith, and so encourage themselves in sin by the confident expectation of impunity. It will, however, still be undeniable, that *the most holy doctrine of* primitive Christianity can never be cordially embraced, except by a holy faith.

St. James carefully distinguishes a cordial consent to the true gospel from a *dead faith*; for saving faith is *living* and *operative*; and by it we receive the truths of revelation with cordial satisfaction and correspondent affections, as relating to our own situation, character, and everlasting interests. "Being warned of God," and "believing the truth," "we are moved with fear;" we perceive ourselves in danger of the wrath to come, and *allow* that we deserve it; we submit to the righteousness of God, reverence his authority, and implore his mercy; we discover the appointed refuge and flee to it; we perceive the suitableness of his salvation to honour his justice and law, as well as to glorify his grace; and this very circumstance which offends the proud and carnal mind, renders it doubly precious to all those who have "received the love of the truth, that they may be saved."

The apostle Paul speaks of the "faith of God's elect;" and Peter addresses those "who had obtained like *precious faith.*" Tit. i. 1, 2. 2 Pet. i. 1. And thus he gives to *faith* the same epithet, which he annexes to the promises of God, and even to Christ himself:—*precious faith*;—*precious promises*;—*a precious Saviour*: surely then it must be a holy faith, which embraces, and seeks the performance of holy promises, and cordially welcomes a holy Saviour.

Let us, however, more closely examine that peculiar act or exercise of faith, by which we become interested in Christ and his salvation; and in-

Digitized by Google

quire whether it be *carnal* or *spiritual* in its specific nature.—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit:" there is no middle term between them. Whatsoever is born of the flesh is carnal: and the apostle declares that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" and that "they who are in the flesh cannot please God." Hence we before inferred that the faith of an unregenerate man cannot please God: and here let it be carefully noted, that there is no alternative; but saving faith is either *holy* or *unholy*, and not something of a middle nature, which is neither *holy* nor *unholy*.

True faith simply credits the divine testimony in those points which most offend and oppose the pride and lusts of the human heart: and thus "he that believeth hath set to his seal that God is true;" while unbelief makes God a liar. Faith owns the Son of God as the Lord from heaven, as God manifested in the flesh, that Jesus, whom unbelieving Jews crucified, and whom all unbelievers crucify afresh; and views him as now risen from the dead, reigning in glory, the Ruler and Judge of the whole world, Omnipotent to save and destroy. Faith embraces the doctrine of the cross with cordial approbation, as the wisdom and power of God unto salvation, while it is foolishness to those that perish. Faith submits to God's righteousness, allows that every sinner deserves the threatened curse of the law, and renounces expressly all other pleas or confidences, except free mercy through the righteousness, atonement, and mediation of Emmanuel.—Faith unreservedly disavows all attempts to compensate for past sins, to establish a righteousness by any personal obedience or efforts whatever, or to save the soul from deserved and final destruction. Faith gives the Lord credit for his wisdom, justice, and goodness, even where they are not discerned; and by it the self-condemned sinner ventures on his mercy and truth in the grand concerns of eternity; entrusting the soul into his hands in full credence, confidence, and affiance, as both willing and able to keep that which is thus committed to him; and this in the clearest view of the importance of the case, and the difficulties that lie in the way of salvation. Faith "counts all things but lost," in comparison of Christ and his salvation; it discovers the treasure hid in the field, the Pearl of great price; and convinced that its value is inestimable, with joy *sells all*, to secure the advantageous purchase. Faith dreads nothing so much as falling short of that salvation, which unbelievers despise, and to which they prefer the most trifling interest or most worthless indulgence. Faith comes at the Lord's call, uses his appointed means, waits in his way, stays his time, and says under every delay or discouragement, "Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life." These things are essential to faith, be it weaker or stronger, as must be evident to every one who makes the word of God the standard of his judgment. Even in its feeblest form, its first trembling application to Christ, while the distressed sinner cries with tears, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" it has this nature, and virtually implies all these things: and do not these denote some degree of a *right spirit*, of a *holy state* of the heart and affections?

The word of God no where mentions two sorts of true faith; but if the first actings of a sinner's faith in Christ were entirely devoid of *holiness*, and the subsequent exercises of faith were *holy*; some distinction of this kind would certainly have been intimated. If it could be proved that saving faith preceded regeneration, and every degree of evangelical repentance: surely no man would suppose that all the subsequent exercises of faith, till it be swallowed up in vision, result from merely natural principles, or such influences of the Spirit as are entirely distinct from sanctification; and that they are detached from repentance and all other holy dispositions and affections! And will any experienced Christian deliberately maintain, that the established believer's daily exercise of faith in Christ, for pardon, peace, wisdom, strength, and sanctifying grace, *essentially* differs from his first coming to him for salvation? We acquire indeed, as we go forward, more distinct acquaintance with our own wants, and with that fulness from which they are

Digitized by Google

supplied; and at some times the testimony of our consciences, aided by that of the Spirit of adoption, inspires peculiar confidence in pleading the Lord's promises. But there are times also, when we feel such darkness, sinfulness, and perplexity, that we can only come on the ground of a general invitation; and when the whole of our first experience must be again passed through, as the best, or the only way of finding rest to our souls. Nor are those humiliating seasons uncommon to most of us; when, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is of all other prayers most suited to our feelings; and when we come, to our own apprehension, as "poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked," as when we first "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." The degree and order of these experiences, desires, and affections vary; but the *nature* of them is precisely the same, whether that be *holy* or *unholy*. It is all along, an ignorant helpless child, a criminal, a diseased perishing wretch, applying to an all-merciful and all-powerful Saviour, to be taught, pardoned, cleansed, assisted, protected, relieved, enriched, and completely rescued and blessed, by free unmerited grace, through the redemption of his blood, the gift of his righteousness, the prevalence of his intercession, and the supply of his Spirit. The more simply and humbly this is done, the stronger is the faith exercised; and likewise the greater is the measure of a holy disposition which is manifested, though the person himself may not be conscious of it. The sinner, thus exercising faith in Christ, and applying to him continually for the supply of all his numerous wants, deliverance from merited destruction, and the free gift of eternal life, *judges* and *feels* concerning himself, his past conduct, his present duties, and his own heart, as he ought to *judge* and *feel*. *He thinks soberly of himself*, and as he ought to think; and in proportion, the state of his judgment and affections, respecting the perfections, law, and government of God; respecting sin and holiness, this world and the next, Christ and his gospel, and almost every other subject, is rectified, and rendered what it ought to be. This is implied in the very idea of living by faith in the Son of God, and is inseparable from it, from the first feeble trembling cry, "Lord save me, I perish," till the believer, in full assurance of hope, breathes his last, saying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."

If some of those who maintain that there is no holiness in saving faith, (at least when first exercised by the convinced sinner,) should be called to converse with a man, whom they had intimately known when a stout-hearted self-confident Pharisee, and should find him deploring the wickedness of his past life, the hypocrisy of his proud duties, the worthlessness of his present endeavours to repent and seek mercy, and the exceeding deceitfulness of his own heart; should they hear him own that God might justly leave him to perish, and express many trembling apprehensions, lest the Saviour whom he had so long rejected should now reject him, and disregard his feeble defiled prayers: should they, I say, witness this scene, would they not be convinced that an alteration for the better had taken place in his mind, and that, in proportion as he had more lowly thoughts concerning himself? Would they not be ready to say, "What hath God wrought?" And could they deny that the *change* was from a *wrong* to a *right* state of the heart and affections: or in other words, from *unholiness* to *holiness*? They would *feel*, that they ought not to inquire what the man thought of himself; but in what light that God, "whose judgment is according to truth," viewed his former and his present disposition; and what the Scripture has determined concerning it.

The sacred Scriptures distinguish between a *living faith*, and a *dead faith*; but not between a *legal* and an *evangelical faith*, as many persons now do: and on this ground alone, we may fairly conclude that this unscriptural distinction was devised to support an unscriptural system. *Dead faith* credits the doctrines of the gospel, as readily as other parts of revealed truth; and *living faith* as simply believes the testimony of God concerning the demands and curse of the law, a future judgment, and the wrath to come, as it does

Digitized by Google

the doctrines and promises of the gospel. But, as it hath before been observed, dead faith is merely an assent to certain opinions *as true*, without a cordial approbation of them as *holy, just, good, suitable*, and *valuable*, with reference to a man's own character, conduct, and situation. It is therefore either wholly *inefficacious*, (for being destitute of *spiritual* life it has no efficacy to excite *spiritual* affections, much less to produce them; and can only work by *natural* principles,) or it gives rise to slavish terrors connected with enmity, and sometimes terminating in blasphemous despair; (as "the devils also believe and tremble:") or it abuses divine truth by presumptuous confidence, and excites selfish affections without repentance, love, and holy obedience, like those of the Israelites when they saw the Egyptians dead on the sea-shore, as they are described by the Psalmist: "Then believed they his word and sang his praise. They soon forgat his works, and would not abide his counsel; but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert." Ps. cvi. 12—14. According to our Lord's word's, converts of this description "have no root in themselves, but for a while *believe*, and in time of temptation fall away." And he teaches us how to address unproved professors of the gospel, by his own example as recorded by the Evangelist: "As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John viii. 30—32.

But *living* faith is an active principle in a soul alive to God: it receives the truth in love, and is permanently and *spiritually* operative upon the understanding, will, and affections. A dead corpse may have every limb, organ, and vessel, in exact order and proportion; while a living man may want an eye, a leg, or a hand, or be otherwise mutilated, defective, or ill proportioned. True faith, therefore, cannot be known by *the doctrines believed*, as the distinction between *legal* and *evangelical* faith seems to suppose, but by the *manner* in which they are believed. Many who, *in a certain way*, credit the whole gospel, are hypocrites, and dead in sin; while others, whose creed is very defective, disproportioned, and in some respects erroneous, are sincere Christians, and partakers of divine life. Perhaps they are out of the way of systematical, or even *solid* instruction; or they are not yet freed from prejudices, through which they cannot receive some parts of divine truth; or they are babes in Christ, who feed on milk, and being unskilful in the word of righteousness cannot *digest strong meat*; yet their faith is *living*, and effectually influences their conduct; their imperfect views of truth are humbling, sanctifying, and transforming; and they are gradually, by searching the Scriptures and praying for divine illumination, "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

When the apostle had said, "Without *faith* it is impossible to please God;" he added, "for he that cometh unto God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that dilligently seek him." Heb. xi. 6. I apprehend, the reason he assigned for his universal proposition, is not very satisfactory to many persons, who very steadily maintain the proposition itself: but it accords well to the views given in this publication. A general belief concerning the existence and perfections of the one living and true God, and his *merciful* readiness to accept, and even "reward, those that diligently seek him," notwithstanding past offences and present sinfulness, has been and is essentially necessary, under every dispensation, and in all possible circumstances, to encourage and incline men to *come unto God*; and it forms the lowest degree and exercise of *faith* that can be conceived. But many, we may warrantably conclude, have pleased God, in seeking him *as just and merciful*, on the ground of revelation, written or handed to them by oral tradition, without *explicit* faith in Christ, or a clear knowledge of the plan of salvation.

Faith, even in that indistinct and incipient exercise which has been described, receives with cordial approbation many of those truths, against which

Digitized by Google

the proud and carnal heart rises with disgust and indignation, or which it perverts to the vilest purposes. It consents to them on the ground of divine revelation, though they are contrary to man's vain imaginations and proud reasonings; and it practically uses them in various instances which run counter to worldly interest, reputation, indulgence, and natural inclination.—Even this must require a state of the heart far above the propensities of fallen man, and contrary to his alienation from God, and whatever bears the stamp of his holiness. But when further illumination has led the believer to a more explicit knowledge of Christ, and to receive him for all the purposes of salvation; his faith is an exercise of the soul peculiarly humble, submissive, obedient, and expressive of unreserved reconciliation to God; and it contains almost as much genuine holiness in its nature, as any thing we are capable of in this state of imperfection.

It is generally and justly agreed, that all the graces of the Spirit have a near agreement, and intimate co-existence, a mutual subserviency, and an inseparable connexion: like the several colours of the sun-beams, which, though seen distinct in the prism and rainbow, yet so coalesce and blend together, as to form a pure and beautiful whiteness. Thus the love of God cannot subsist in that heart which is totally destitute of faith; or faith in the heart, which is at enmity with God.—True repentance is believing repentance; true faith is penitent faith; reverential fear cannot exist without love; holy love of God implies reverence, and fear of dishonouring and offending him: and an earnest desire that the Lord should be reconciled to us, and receive us into his favour according to the gospel, implies an incipient disposition to be reconciled to him, to his character, government, commandments, and service. And hence it is, that the approved character is described in Scripture, sometimes by one and sometimes by another of these holy dispositions; but we must not on that ground conclude that they exist separately, but, on the contrary, that where one is, there all are found.

It has before been observed, that by faith in Christ is not *here* meant, "a confidence that Christ and his salvation belong to me in particular, without any regard to the state of my heart, or my real character at present in the sight of God." Such a confidence may indeed be altogether *unholy*; and it is generally the selfish presumption of an unhumbled carnal heart, aided by an *unfeeling* or erroneous conscience, and acquired by the belief of an unscriptural representation of the gospel.

Divine faith must be grounded on the word of God; but no man's *name* is inserted in Scripture, as *names* are in *grants* and *wills*; to which the engagements and promises of the new covenant are sometimes compared. In order therefore to be assured that I am the person to whom the promised blessings belong, I must inquire whether my case and character accord with those described in the promises. Now these are not made to sinners *as such*, but to *saints*,—to those *that fear the Lord*, and *tremble at his word*; to *the contrite*, the *broken-hearted*, the *mourners*; to those *who trust in the Lord, call upon him, follow after righteousness, know the Lord, love God, do his will, and hearken to the voice of his servants*; to *the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness*, and *such as are persecuted for righteousness sake*. In short, the promises are made to those who *truly believe*; for faith is the radical principle of all holy dispositions. As far, therefore, as we are conscious that our experience, desires, pursuits, habitual aim and character correspond to these dispositions and affections, we may be *sure* that the covenanted blessings belong to us: yet in exactness of language this is not *faith*, but *hope*; the full *assurance of hope*. This should be sought after and preserved by holy diligence: and as the humble believer, however diligent, will commonly be unable of himself to obtain full satisfaction in this matter, it is one part of the office of the Holy Spirit to shine on his own work, to show us the sacred impression, by "which he hath sealed us to the day of redemption," and thus "to witness with our spirits, that we are the children and heirs of God." The least degree indeed of these holy dispositions,

Digitized by Google

according to the gracious tenor of the new covenant, characterizes the possessor as a real Christian, and proves his interest in the promises: but in general he cannot make out his title, with habitual satisfaction, except as he is growing in grace, fruitful in good works, and careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by negligence, or improper conduct.

If any man doubt whether the promises be thus restricted to *characters*, and desire to give the subject an impartial investigation; let him *collect for himself from the Scriptures* all the promises he can find, and compare them diligently with the context: and this will convince him, that they all either expressly mention some branch of holiness, as marking out the persons to whom the promise is made; or relate to such blessings, as no man, destitute of holiness, can sincerely desire and long to obtain.

The *invitations* indeed, and such *promises* as imply *exhortations, counsels, warnings*, or *expostulations* are addressed to the vilest of sinners without exception: but they alone become interested in the annexed or implied promise, who embrace the invitation; attend to the exhortation, and "through grace obey the call." For it is *folly*, not *faith*, for a man to imagine the *feast*, the *treasure*, the *kingdom to be his own*, merely because he has been invited, or instructed how to apply, exhorted to the diligent use of certain means, warned of the consequences of neglecting such unmerited kindness, and assured that nothing but this neglect can deprive him of the benefit; while all the time he absolutely refuses to comply with the end and design of the gracious message!

There is a sense in which Christ may properly be said to have *died for all*; and the infinite sufficiency of his merits and atonement, with the general proposals made in the Scripture, *authorize* and *require* the ministers of Christ, to call on all that hear them without exception, to repent and believe the gospel. But sober Christians, even if they hesitate as to some deep points of doctrine, will scarcely contend, that *Christ died with an express intention of saving all men*; yet this *express intention* alone could warrant a sinner, while an entire stranger to "the things which accompany salvation," confidently to believe, that Christ died for him, and will assuredly save him. Such a confidence, therefore, is entirely destitute of any scriptural foundation, and is a most unwarrantable presumption.

Some persons indeed seem to think, that the proposition, *Christ is mine and will save me*, would never be true, if I should never believe it: but that, if I believe it confidently, with or without reason or evidence, it will certainly prove true: But surely it is very extraordinary, not to say absurd, *that believing what before was not true should convert it into truth!*—The doctrines of Scripture are eternal truths, whether we believe them or not; and God abideth faithful to his promises, though we prove faithless. When a sinner truly believes in Christ, he is interested in all the promises and securities of the new covenant, even while his fears and doubts harass him incessantly: and when, on scriptural grounds, he obtains the *full assurance of hope*, he merely discovers what, though true in itself, he had not before been able to perceive.—One thing indeed is now *true* which once was *not*, namely, he is now born of God, a true penitent, a real convert, a believer, a living member of Christ's body, a child of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and an heir of heaven; whereas he was (not before his *assured hope*, but before his *regeneration*) dead in sin, a slave of Satan, and under the wrath of God, notwithstanding the secret purposes of electing love respecting him.

The words of St. Peter are peculiarly worthy of our attention in this argument, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Now the well-instructed Christian, and he alone, is capable of doing this. He can assign his reasons for believing the Scriptures to be the word of God; he can state the warrant and encouragement given in them to the chief of sinners to believe in Jesus Christ; and he can show from his own experience, character, and pursuits, compared with the declarations and examples of the word of God, the grounds on which

Digitized by Google

he concludes himself a true believer, and an heir of immortal glory. But what *reason* can be given for an assured hope of everlasting life, as the gift of God in Christ, by that man who has no consciousness of having fled to him for refuge, and no experience of a new creation unto holiness?—Indeed it would exceedingly perplex one, to find words more suitable to describe an *irrational, unscriptural,* and *enthusiastical presumption,* than those which some men have employed on this subject; while they have exhorted and counselled their readers, to "work themselves, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, into an assurance that Christ, grace, and heaven are theirs, without any evidence from reason, sense, or Scripture;" and then they have gravely told them, that all holiness will certainly result from this kind of confidence!* What *reason* can a man who follows this counsel give, either of his faith, or hope, or of his religion in general?

The amount of this assured persuasion (call it by what name you will,) is no more than, *I believe that I am a believer.* But if this is true faith, and if the full assurance of faith is our duty, (and doubtless we ought to believe the testimony of God without wavering,) it follows of course, that *we cannot deceive ourselves;* for the more firmly a man *believes that he is a believer,* the stronger must his faith be! Thus all exhortations to self-examination, and all warnings against self-deception, with which the Scriptures abound, are at once vacated and set aside; and that man is actually the safest, who most confidently thinks himself safe!

Far be it from me to charge all who favour, or seem to favour, this notion of faith, with *perceiving* or *allowing* these consequences; for many of them bestow much laudable pains to inculcate a contrary spirit and conduct, and imagine they can shew that their doctrine has no such tendency. But after all, the *inference fairly* and *undeniably* follows from the *premises;* and more *consistent* men, who have none of their piety, will deduce it, and practise accordingly.

If the reader has imbibed the sentiment, that this high confidence of salvation by Christ, even without conscious humiliation and change of heart, is the strong faith spoken of in Scripture; let him very seriously ask himself, (and ask the Lord too in earnest prayer for his teaching) whether this is not the very character delineated under the similitude of the stony-ground hearers? Whether this is not the vain confidence of all those *evangelical hypocrites,* who deceive themselves without expressly designing to deceive others? And whether James does not most directly address such professors when he says, "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead!"—These are questions which should not be cursorily passed over by him who would know "the truth as it is in Jesus;" for in fact they comprise the substance of the whole controversy.

It is not generally and expressly denied, by those who feel themselves interested in these inquiries, that the gospel was intended to honour the holy law of God; to display in perfect harmony the infinite justice, purity, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and truth of his all-glorious character; to lay a foundation for the *hope* of the vilest transgressors connected with the most effectual provision for their humiliation and renewal to the divine image; to excite in the hearts of the redeemed the most fervent exercises of admiring, adoring, zealous, joyful, and thankful love to the God of their salvation; and finally to exhibit the divine glory, in the most awful and affecting light that possibly could be, to the whole intelligent creation through eternal ages.—But if another gospel be introduced, which *merely* provides for the encouragement of sinners *at any rate,* while the other ends of infinite importance, are overlooked, or at least greatly kept out of sight; then the justice and holiness of God, and his strict and spiritual law, appear *terrible* rather than glorious and lovely; the odiousness and desert of transgression are concealed or palliated; salvation from punishment is detached from "the sanc-

* Marshall on Sanctification.

Digitized by Google

tification of the Spirit unto obedience:" and then it is no wonder that unconverted men often credit such a gospel, which is entirely congenial to their pride and carnal minds. Because they may be delighted with the false notions thus given them of the character of God; while they continue to hate the infinitely just and holy God, whom the Scriptures reveal: as the Jews imagined they loved the God of Abraham, whose favourites they deemed themselves, though the Truth himself testified, "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father." And having once thus awfully quieted and pleased themselves with an unholy faith, a presumptuous confidence, selfish affections, and a carnalized gospel, it is alas not probable they should ever be undeceived, till the light of eternity tremendously show them their real character and situation.

The true gospel of Christ reveals "a just God and a Saviour."—The eternal Son of the Father became incarnate, to honour the righteous demands of the holy law by a divinely perfect obedience, during the whole course of his suffering life; and to honour its curse by his unknown agonies in the garden and on the cross; that sinners, who *most justly deserved*, and who must otherwise inevitably have endured the everlasting wrath of God, might through his merits, ransom, and mediation, be freely pardoned, completely justified, and gradually recovered to perfect holiness by the Spirit of God given unto them.—But an unhumbled unholy heart cannot truly believe this gospel; and a faith which does not *allow* the excellency of the law, the desert of sin, and the justice of God in the awful sentence denounced against transgressors, cannot render him the *glory of his free mercy* in salvation. Much less can such a faith give God the glory of all his other perfections, as harmonising with his mercy in that stupendous design, which is the admiration of angels, and all redeemed sinners, and shall be so to all eternity.

It is not meant, that the sinner, when he first comes for mercy to the Saviour *distinctly* perceives these things: but he must be so far enlightened, humbled, softened, and changed, as to yield the point in contest; he must willingly come as a *justly* condemned criminal, for a free and holy salvation in the Lord's appointed way. So that an *unholy* faith can only welcome an *unholy* gospel, and make an *unholy* use of it: and it is observable, that such respectable men as are induced to plead in behalf of this kind of faith; when they proceed to answer objections or to show its *sanctifying* tendency *imperceptibly*, and doubtless *unintentionally*, slide into quite another view of faith, and then it becomes very easy to make the cause appear specious; nor do most readers bestow sufficient pains to detect the latent fallacy, or to become so conversant in such subjects, as to be capable of exactly discriminating between them. The author, however, is confident, that his arguments, if duly weighed and compared with Scripture, will be found conclusive; and fully prove that *saving faith is a holy exercise of the soul.*

SECTION V.

Saving Faith the Principle of all other holy Dispositions, Affections, and Behaviour

THE *holy nature* of true faith may likewise be inferred, with absolute certainty, from the effects produced by it: for "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit;" and every tree is known by its fruit."—Faith, when genuine, excites all holy affections, and works by them in all holy obedience. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved *with fear*, prepared an ark."—Sinners, when warned to flee from the wrath to come, if they believe the warning, are *moved with fear* to forsake their sinful courses and carnal confidences; and when they have been instructed in the gospel,

Digitized by Google

if they believe that gracious message, they are moved "to flee for refuge, to lay hold on the *hope* set before them." Even confirmed disciples are repeatedly warned, "not to fear them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." Matt. x. 28. Luke xii. 4, 5. "Blessed is he that feareth always." "Be not high minded, but *fear*." "Let us therefore *fear*, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." "Let us have grace to serve God, with reverence and godly *fear*; for our God, is a consuming fire." In proportion to the degree in which we understand and believe these words, we shall be moved with *fear*, to use proper means, and flee to a distance from the danger: for "a prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished." And this fear implies reverence to the authority and justice of God, hope in his mercy, and a desire of his favour, and the happiness he bestows; which implies love of his excellencies, as well as dread of his awful power and indignation.

But the highest and purest energy of Faith consists in calling forth *holy love* into vigorous exercises; and by its powerful influence constraining the believer to all devoted and self-denying obedience, and patient suffering for the Lord's sake. Indeed *this* will be perceived, by those who well consider the subject, to comprise every thing: for *love* is the leading affection of the soul, and governs all others.—When therefore the apostle would mark, in few words, the essential distinction between a Christian and all other men, he says, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but *faith which worketh by love*." Gal. v. 6, 13, 14. Now "love is the fulfilling of the law," and likewise the principal fruit of the Spirit; God is Love, and heaven is love: and can faith not at all *holy* excite in us the most *holy* and *spiritual* of all exercises of the rational soul?—I say *excite*, not *produce*; for, in strict propriety, the *production* of any holy disposition must be ascribed entirely to the Holy Spirit; and no sort of faith could possibly work by holy love, if the heart continued unregenerate, and in a state of enmity against God.

The views, which saving faith gives the soul of those objects that revelation brings to our knowledge, are suited to call forth the most lively exercises of love to Christ, and the most delightful admiration of his glorious excellencies, and his compassion to lost sinners: they will excite also an ardent desire after the nearest union and communication with him, a decided preference of his favour to all earthly objects, a fear of coming short of this highest privilege and advantage, gratitude proportioned to our hope, zeal for his glory, attachment to his cause, and a peculiar regard to all which stands related to him or bears his image. This love of Christ is *substantially* the same with the love of God: for we sinners know, approach, believe, trust, love, and honour the Father, only in and by his beloved Son. The same exercises of faith call forth our love to our brethren, and to all men, according to the precepts and example of our beloved Redeemer: and thus *faith working by love* manifests itself in all godliness, righteousness, temperance, kindness, and beneficence. Even repentance, in all its exercises to the end of life, is excited by a *belief of the divine testimony* in one way or other; while some degree of true repentance is necessary to explicit faith in Christ. In proportion to the increase and vigour of living faith, will be the growth and ardour of all holy affections, and our persevering fruitfulness in all real good works. The more clearly and constantly the believer contemplates a crucified Saviour, and scripturally relies on him with earnest application of heart for all the blessings of salvation; the more humble, spiritual, obedient, zealous, loving, harmless, pure, self-denying, and actively beneficent will he be.

And the reason of this is, because true faith, springing from regeneration, co-exists in the heart with all other gracious dispositions; and evidencing to the soul one part of divine truth after another, as circumstances require and occasions are given, it excites them all by turns into more vigorous and sen-

Digitized by Google

sible exercise. It is, however, an *unedifying curious speculation* to dispute which of them *in order of time* has the priority: "seeing the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," quickening the sinner who had been dead in sin, is at once the Author and Source of them all. The varied experiences of different persons, with the numberless undiscoverable, and generally unnoticed, circumstances, which cause some first to attend to one, and some to another, of the feelings of their own minds, will certainly lead them to different and even contrary determinations, according to the schemes of doctrine which they severally adopt.

It is very commonly stated that "faith purifies the heart:" but the language of Scripture is more accurate:—namely, that "God purifieth the heart by faith." Acts xv. 9. Having enabled the sinner, by his new-creating grace, cordially to believe the gospel; by the varied actings of that faith he excites every holy affection; and as these prevail and gather strength, all unholy desires and propensities are dethroned, hated, mortified, and gradually abolished. In entire agreement with this, yet taking another view of the subject, the apostle Peter says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls, in *obeying the truth, through the Spirit*, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." 1 Peter i. 22. They were active in this *purifying of their souls*; but it was effected by obeying the truth; and this was done by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For "the fruit of the Spirit is love." No man, who scripturally holds the doctrine of regeneration, will ascribe the "purifying of the heart" to faith, as to its *efficient "cause*;" but faith is the *spiritual organ of sight and perception*, through which invisible things are so shown to the soul by the Holy Spirit, as to effect, through his continual agency, a gradual renovation. Faith (being itself the gift of God and the operation of the Spirit) applies for, and receives those heavenly influences, by which the seeds of universal holiness, sown in regeneration, spring forth and grow to maturity; according to the declaration of St. Paul, "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" and thus we are gradually purified from the remainder of our proud, carnal, and selfish passions and propensities.

Similar to this is the language of St. John, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The apostle ascribes these *effects* of "*loving God, keeping his commandments, and overcoming the world*," to the faith of those who are *born of God*; and he evidently speaks of this *faith as essentially belonging to that which is born of God*. Such a faith, exciting and working by holy love, gives the soul a decided victory over the love of worldly objects, the fear of men, a false shame and regard to character, and every carnal and selfish principle: and it thus renders obedience not only practicable, but delightful. Thus St. Paul exclaims, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." Gal. vi. 14.

He also shows us that all the self-denying, courageous, and zealous obedience of the Old Testament saints sprang from faith, as its immediate cause. "*By faith* Enoch walked with God." "*By faith* Abraham obeyed;—and offered Isaac." "*By faith* Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of reward. *By faith* he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Let any sober and pious mind determine whether the judgment, choice, and purpose of faith, in these cases, were not spiritual and holy.—In many instances, the particular exercise of faith, to which the obedience is ascribed, was entirely

Digitized by Google

distinct from reliance on Christ for salvation: but even here faith had the same general nature; it cordially received the testimony of God, and in his prescribed way expected the performance of his promises, from his divine mercy, power, and faithfulness; and had reference to the predicted Messiah, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The same faith, which interested these ancient servants of God in Christ for justification, influenced them to render the promptest obedience in the most difficult circumstances: and it is observable, that the same actions, which the apostle ascribes to *faith* as their principle, are elsewhere spoken of as the result and evidence of other holy dispositions. "By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." "By this I know that thou *fearest* God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Heb. xi. 17. Gen. xxii. 12.

The words of the Lord Jesus to the apostle of the Gentiles shows the holy nature, as well as the sanctifying efficacy, of true faith. "I send thee to them, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; *that they may receive forgiveness of sins*, and inheritance among them that are *sanctified by faith* that is in me." This commission the apostle executed, by "showing that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance:" Acts xxvi. 16—20. and certainly it implies that sinners are illuminated, and converted unto God, *in order* to their forgiveness, and not *in consequence* of it. And as sanctification is here ascribed to the efficacy of *faith* in Christ, so our Lord elsewhere says, "Sanctify them *by thy truth*; thy word is truth." John xvii. 17. Holy truth alone can be the seed of holiness in the soul: "the good seed is the word of the kingdom:" but tares produce tares: and *an honest and good heart* is the only ground in which that seed takes root, springs up, and brings forth fruit; or a holy faith alone can so receive the holy truth, as to use it in progressive sanctification. Dropping the metaphor, Christ had before said to the eleven, "Now ye are *clean*, through the word which I have spoken unto you:" John xv. 3. Thus our Lord, while Judas was present, said to the apostles, "Ye are clean, but not all:" yet after the traitor was gone, he said to the eleven, "Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken to you."—It is however evident, not only that Judas had heard the same word; but that his faith differed from that of the other apostles, more in the manner of his believing, than in the doctrines he believed.

Indeed every thing holy in the hearts and lives of sinners, *(except regeneration)* is ascribed in the Scriptures to the energy of faith in its varied exercises; whereas many *seem* almost entirely to confine this influence to justification, except as they, without the least warrant from Scripture, speak of its regenerating the soul! Christians *live by faith, stand by faith, walk by faith, obey by faith, fight the good fight of faith, overcome the world by faith*, and "are kept by the power of God, *through faith*, unto salvation." The *shield of faith* is one principle part of our spiritual armour; and as every other part of this panoply of God denotes things of a holy nature, why should faith alone be deemed an exception? Or are we justified by one kind of faith, and do we fight our enemies by another? We read of "the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope:" but who can imagine, that the apostle meant a *holy love*, a *holy hope*, and an *unholy faith*? "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him," (that is, by the same kind of faith;) "rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught." Col. ii. 6, 7.

It has been repeatedly observed, that true faith, by receiving the sure testimony of God, appropriates the information he bestows on those most important subjects, concerning which unbelief must remain in ignorance, or be left to uncertain reasonings and conjectures. It is therefore a real act of faith to believe on this sure testimony, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God:" that "we cannot serve God and Mammon:" and that "no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and

Digitized by Google

of God; let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." If then a person be actually living in the practice of any of these iniquities, and yet think himself a justified person because of his creed and experience; his confidence is the result of direct *unbelief*, and expressly treats the plain testimony of God as a lie:

It is indeed a distinct act of faith to believe that "Jesus is the Son of God;" that "he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification:" and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." But it would be very absurd to suppose, that these divine testimonies contradict those before mentioned; or that any man truly believed the one, while he directly disbelieved the other! When therefore a sinner is brought truly to believe those declarations of Scripture, which show his real state and character, he is prepared to believe also those truths which relate to Christ and his salvation, and will certainly apply to him for deliverance from sin as well as from condemnation. This is properly *faith in Christ*, and it is immediately connected with *justification*; but it implies the belief of all other truths contained in the sacred oracles, as far as they are understood and seen to be there revealed. Such of these as relate to the perfections, authority, and glory of God, with our relations and accountableness to him, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, a future judgment, and eternal happiness or misery; when set before the soul by that "faith, which is the evidence of things not seen," are suited to call forth awful reverential fear of God, and of his holy heart-searching presence, dread of his wrath, regard to his will, sorrow for sin, humiliation, and abhorrence of evil. The realising belief of those truths, which more especially relate to the gospel, is equally calculated to excite a lively hope of mercy; a purifying, establishing, yea *triumphant* expectation of heavenly felicity; ardent longings after spiritual blessings, counterbalanced with jealous fears of coming short of them; admiring, adoring, grateful love; zeal for the honour of God, and the success of true religion; proportional disregard to temporal interests or losses, pains or pleasures, honour or dishonour; unfeigned and fervent love of our brethren and neighbours and even of our most embittered enemies; and still deeper self-abasement and hatred of all sin.

These affections, when vigorous and permanent, being connected with a firm dependence on the promises of the new covenant, and maintained in exercise by "communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," through the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit, are fully adequate to the ends for which they were intended; and cannot but impel and *constrain* the lively believer to the most self-denying and devoted obedience, and the most persevering patience in suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Hence originated all those extraordinary actions of zealous obedience, courageous firmness, and unwearied endurance which the Scriptures record, and which have appeared in the character and conduct of saints and martyrs in every age of the church. And upon diligent and patient investigation it will be found, that *this view of faith* consolidates, as it were, and harmonizes the whole of what the oracles of God teach us on these subjects; so that precepts, doctrines, promises, threatenings, exhortations, invitations, cautions, and delineations of character, all here meet in full agreement.

Man is justly condemned for breaking the holy and good law of his Creator, and for being an enemy to him in his heart. The way of reconciliation and recovery is provided in Emmanuel's person and redemption, to the praise of the glory of God. All who truly believe are fully pardoned and justified, and shall be eternally saved: this faith is the effect of regeneration, and results from *spiritual life*; it implies true repentance in its very essence; it works by love of God and man; it purifies the heart and overcomes the world; it gradually forms the character, regulates the temper and passions, influences the words and actions, and thus, through the continued agency of the Holy Spirit, renders the believer fruitful and zealous in all good works.

Digitized by Google

" In Christ Jesus nothing availeth, but faith that worketh by love ;"—" nothing availeth but a new creature."—" Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing ; but the keeping of the commandments of God." 1 Cor. vii. 19. Gal. v. 6 ; vi. 15. According to the view given above, these several propositions perfectly coincide. The *new creature* exercises *faith that worketh by love ;* and " this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous." " He," says the divine Saviour, " that hath my commandments and keepeth them ; he it is that loveth me." " Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." And St. John says, " And this is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." " This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also."

If St. James says, " Faith *without works is dead ;*" St. Paul plainly teaches that no faith availeth, except that *which worketh by love.* And when the former inquires, " Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" he answers his own question, by adding, " Seest thou how faith wrought by his works, and by works was faith made perfect: and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham *believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,* and he was called the friend of God." James ii. 14—26.

The question to be resolved in the decision of every man's doom at the day of judgment, according to numerous Scriptures, must be this, " Was he a believer in Christ or not?"—If any one profess faith in Christ, it will be inquired, " Whether his faith were living or dead?" Whether or not it wrought by love of Christ, and of his brethren for Christ's sake?" As a man's actions *when the whole shall be disclosed,* determine this point, so will his sentence be : while the degree of the unbeliever's guilt will fix the measure of his punishment ; and the believer will be graciously recompensed in proportion to his fruitfulness. This seems to elucidate and harmonize all the representations given us of this infinitely momentous concern. The holy judge himself hath solemnly warned his professed disciples on this all-important subject, when, with unspeakable dignity, he declares, " Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.—Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto you, I never knew you, Depart from me ye that work iniquity. *Therefore* whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand : and the rain descended, and the floods came and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." *The wise man* doubtless is the true Christian : his faith is living and obedient : thus he builds aright on the only sure foundation, and raises a permanent structure, which all the storms of life and death shall assail in vain. But many *foolish men,* professing to build on the tried foundation which God hath laid, are either misled by erring guides, or mistake the instructions and slight the warnings of *wise master-builders :* thus they deceive themselves with notions, and with a dead faith ; their presumptuous confidence and disobedient profession will make way for the awful fall of their fair but baseless edifice, in the great decisive day ; and unutterable astonishment, anguish, and despair, will seize upon them, when the frowning Judge shall leave them speechless, while, with an awful frown, he will say, " I never knew you, Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Whether, therefore, we consider the author and origin of *saving faith,* its invariable attendants, its essential nature, or its distinguishing effects, we

find unanswerable proof that it is a *holy* exercise of the rational soul; that it has its especial seat in the *heart*; that it receives the light of heavenly truth in holy love; and it employs that light to invigorate and call forth into action all spiritual affections, and to render the believer "holy in all manner of conversation." But if each view of saving faith, considered separately, demonstrate its holy nature: how powerful and overbearing is the evidence, when we collect all these converging rays into one focus, and estimate the force of these several arguments united together! If this do not convince the reader; but he will yet contend that justifying faith is the mere assent of the understanding partially enlightened, and the reluctant consent of an unhumbled unholy heart, as terrified by the report of vengeance, to sue for mercy of which it feels no real need; and yet that this selfish unholy faith sanctifies the soul, and produces most excellent fruit in the life! Or that true faith is neither the one nor the other of these, but something between that can neither be defined nor described; he must retain his opinion, and be left as inaccessible to argument. Some may indeed question whether he do not verge to the *honest* but *absurd* exclamation of an ancient zealot, "*Credo quia impossibile est*:" (I believe, *because* it is impossible:) and, whatever favourable opinion we may form of his heart, we must again affirm that it is *impossible* for him to "give a *reason* of the hope that is in him." But if any one, allowing in general the truth of those things that have been stated concerning saving faith, should yet feel some hesitation about the use of the word *holy* in this connexion: the author will hold no controversy with him on this point. Provided the essential and unspeakably important distinction between *living and dead faith* were unreservedly allowed, and given its due *prominence* in the views and discourses of Christians and ministers; the rest would be in great measure a verbal controversy, from which every wise man would turn to more pleasant and profitable employments.

SECTION VI.

Some Reasons assigned for insisting on the Holy Nature of Saving Faith.

It may probably be inquired by the reader, why we bestow so much pains to prove the holy nature of saving faith; seeing we allow that the sinner makes no use of this holiness as an encouragement, and indeed seldom notices it, in his first applications to Christ for salvation? To this question I would answer.

I. It is in order to induce Christians, and especially ministers, to use the scriptural method of preventing men from deceiving themselves. It will be found at the great decisive day, that nothing has more conduced to quiet nominal Christians in impenitence and unbelief, than a groundless persuasion that they do indeed repent and believe. The laboured arguments, therefore, of the preceding pages are not so much intended for the use of newly awakened persons, as for more established Christians; and especially for those who, by office or in charity, instruct and converse frequently with persons thus circumstanced. Indeed discussions on such topics cannot be fully understood, except by those "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil:" and of course they are generally improper for the new-born babe. But the instructions publicly or privately given to inquirers, will accord to the sentiments and judgment of real Christians, and especially those of the pastors of the Lord's flock: whatever therefore tends to a sound understanding of Scripture, among those who already believe the gospel, will conduce to prevent self-deception in others, when first entering on a religious

Digitized by Google

profession. And *prevention* is almost our only hope: for the most able and experienced ministers have agreed, that the undeceiving of one, whom Satan has soothed into a false peace by an unsound profession of the gospel, is a thing which very seldom occurs.

It is commonly indeed answered, that "many will deceive themselves, however we may state and explain the doctrine of faith:" but surely we should dread, as the most awful calamity, being in any degree accessory to the destructive delusion! And if we do not dread it *on their account*, we have proportionable need *to be alarmed on our own*, lest "their blood should be required at our hands." Even when the good seed, unmingled with tares, is sown; the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart, the wiles of the tempter, and the fascinations of the world, will influence many to "speak peace to themselves, when there is no peace:" but "while *the servants slept* the enemy sowed the tares," and all their subsequent vigilance could not eradicate them; for these "children of the wicked one" must be left intermixed with true believers till the harvest. Some good men indeed, in their earnestness to gather up the tares, have endangered the wheat, and "offended against the generation of God's children:" but may not vigilance and caution be used by way of prevention, without the least danger of that kind?

If we do not, in the most *careful* and *explicit* manner, explain what we mean by *salvation* and by *faith*, Satan will prevail with men to catch at peace and comfort prematurely, and to use our words for this purpose: and thus we shall incur the charge of "healing their hurt deceitfully," by "speaking peace when there is no peace." Men are exceedingly apt to conclude, even when the utmost caution is used in stating the doctrines of the gospel, that exemption from punishment and a title to future happiness constitute the whole of *salvation*, and that confidence in Christ to save them from wrath and bring them to heaven, though they do not concur in other respects with the design of his incarnation and mediation, is *faith in him*. And if they once get so thoroughly possessed of these notions, through our inaccuracy and incautious language, as to quiet their consciences by them; whenever we afterwards insist on the fruits of faith, and its sanctifying effects in holy tempers and good works, they will (not altogether without reason) charge us with inconsistency; and meet with numbers to encourage them in exclaiming against all these exhortations, as *legal*, as tending to bring them into bondage.—So that while it is allowed that many, who give a very different description of faith from that which is here maintained, bestow much pains to guard their doctrine from abuse, and clearly show that *true faith* always produces holiness: it is also asserted that in these attempts they deviate from their own previous definition of faith, and substitute another idea in its place. True believers are doubtless holy in proportion to the degree of their faith: and if their *hope* be scriptural, the more *assured* it is, the more "steadfast, unmoveable, and earnestly abounding in the work of the Lord," they will certainly be found. But we inquire, whether many do not "think themselves something when they are nothing, and so deceive themselves?" Whether many, who disclaim good works, do not satisfy their minds with visionary impulses, enthusiastical raptures, and a change of creed, though strangers to that *holy* calling of which the apostle spoke? 2 Tim. i. 9. Whether there be not a *dead* faith as well as a *living* faith? Whether the former be not often more confident than the latter? Whether there be not a groundless presumption, as well as "a hope that maketh not ashamed?" And whether an unholy faith and confidence can be *sanctifying*? It is true that several of the persons to whom these questions are proposed, are completely exculpated from all *intention* to loosen the believer's obligation to obedience: but good men may *endorse* and give currency to bad bills, and thus *incautiously* aid the dishonest to defraud their unsuspecting neighbours. Nor let it be forgotten, that we can only judge of the *tendency of the doctrine*, and are not at all required to decide on the *intention of the teacher*.

Shrewd men of corrupt minds, such "as privily bring in damnable here-

Digitized by Google

sies," "teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake," or from ambition and love of popularity, will avail themselves of every expression in the works of respectable writers, which can be made to serve their pernicious purposes. They will detach them from their connexion, explain them in their own way, and draw such inferences from them, as the authors of them most heartily abhorred; and this especially after they are dead, and cannot explain themselves. And superficial readers or hearers, who want a cheap opiate to quiet conscience, will be emboldened, by a name of established reputation, to drink the fatal poison. The book whence the passage is quoted, and which, if fairly consulted, would furnish an antidote, is meanwhile neglected; and thus "Satan, transformed into an angel of light," deceives the soul of the unwary.

Even while the apostles were yet alive, it was needful to guard professed Christians against being "deceived by vain words:" nay, "men of perverse minds" distorted the very language of inspiration to bring on others and "on themselves, swift destruction." We ought therefore to be extremely circumspect, not "to give occasion to those that seek occasion:" and we are expressly commanded to "gather up the stumbling-blocks out of the way" of those who inquire after salvation. The enemy will if possible sow tares; he will do it while we sleep, by his own servants: but his triumph is in this respect complete, when he can prevail with the ministers of Christ to mix tares with the wheat, which they sow in their Master's field.

If it has then been proved that saving faith is a holy exercise of the soul, it is certainly of the greatest importance that this should be clearly understood; and that the servants of the Lord should be fully aware of the consequences which result from a contrary representation, and even from incautious and unguarded expressions on the subject. Without embarrassing *inquirers* by distinctions which they cannot possibly understand, if a *holy faith* were constantly described in its nature and effects, and a *holy salvation* uniformly set before our auditories; and if men were earnestly cautioned to beware of counterfeits, awakened persons would be far less liable to be decieved by *a dead faith into vain confidence* than they are when such precautions are neglected. Without directly adverting to their own case, they would thus be imperceptibly formed to an habitual conviction, that salvation from wrath is inseparably connected with salvation from sin; and that true faith receives Christ in his whole character, and in all his offices, with cordial approbation and gratitude; and is in these respects widely different from a mere assent of the understanding to the doctrines of the gospel.

II. We insist on this subject thus earnestly, for the sake of such as *are without*. If men take offence at the real gospel of Christ, they alone are answerable for it: but if we state things unscripturally, and so needlessly stumble and prejudice them, we become accessory to their destruction. Now, *they that are without* are liable to be stumbled in various ways by the subject before us. The *doctrine of salvation of free grace, through faith alone, by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and an interest in his atonement, and not in any sense by our own works*, is sufficiently offensive to the pride and carnal enmity of man's heart, and entirely contrary to all his vain reasonings and imaginations. This cannot be avoided; and we ought not to keep back or modify any part of the truth, to render it more palatable. But it must tend exceedingly to increase the prejudices of carnal men against the gospel, (especially those of the more moral, sensible, and respectable among them,) if we maintain *that saving faith is not holy in its nature; that it precedes repentance, and completely justifies the man, who to that moment has been destitute of godly sorrow for sin, and every degree of a disposition to amend his life; and that he is actually reconciled to God, as pardoned, accepted, and received to full favour, before he begins to repent or to do works meet for repentance!* Yet all this and much more to the same purpose may be *collected* from the scattered passages, contained in the writings of those who have espoused this cause; and not merely *inferred* from their principles! Worldly men will not annex our ap-

Digitized by Google

propriate ideas to the expressions we use: but they will generally put the least favourable construction on them of which they are capable, and then draw their own conclusions. Indeed facts demonstrate that numbers, viewing Christianity only at a distance, are set against the gospel by those distorted representations of it, for which some pious men zealously contend! Many know enough of the Scriptures to perceive, that the doctrines of Christianity are there stated very differently, from what they hear or read in the discourses of several among those, who almost exclusively assume the title of *evangelical*. And being satisfied that some of their sentiments are unscriptural, their dislike to the whole plan of the gospel shelters itself under that conviction: and supposing that they are only averse to the *errors* of the system, which *in all respects they really dislike*, they adhere to their own forms and notions with more decided self-congratulation. Others, on the contrary, perceiving that the doctrines justly called *evangelical*, are certainly contained in the Scriptures, and hearing such exceptionable inferences drawn from them, hastily conclude, according to the dictates of a proud and carnal heart that Christianity is chargeable with the whole, and that such a religion cannot be from God! Thus they are prepared to hearken to the insinuations of infidels, who are more indebted for their success to the follies and vices of professed Christians, than to the strength of their own arguments, or even zealous efforts to promote the desperate cause.

Some individuals who now preach the gospel, have declared, that after they had received serious impressions, they were long prejudiced by these things, and could not receive the doctrines of grace exactly as proposed, even by those of reputation among the evangelical people with whom they were acquainted. This has occasioned many doubts and delays, and exposed them to divers temptations; till a nearer view of the subject convinced them, that the opinions to which they objected had no foundation in Scripture, and were not in reality connected with the doctrines in question.

It would probably be found, upon careful inquiry, that this consideration has not its due weight among us. In conversation one with another, we speak of the reception which our sentiments meet with among our *friends* and *favourers*, and the good supposed to be done: but do not enough consider what impression is made on occasional hearers, or readers, who are strangers to our system, or prejudiced against it. Perhaps, in some instances, thousands are rendered more determined in their aversion to the gospel, by the *reverberated* and *enhanced* report of some *crude and unscriptural tenet*, or some *light and ludicrous* expression, which *injudicious* friends most extravagantly applauded, and fancied very useful.

It has been above observed that when respectable persons adopt unscriptural sentiments, or use terms fairly capable of an ill construction, men of another character will go still further. They will leave the general doctrine unexplained and unguarded, or explain it in the worst sense: they will draw their own conclusions, and make their own use of it; and thus propagate a spurious gospel, by the authority of reputable names. In the mean time sensible and discerning men, who dislike the doctrines of grace, but take merely a distant and exterior view of the heterogeneous multitude, which, in one form or other, profess them, have their prejudices exceedingly increased, and even *justified* to their own consciences, by the wild and extravagant sentiments thus disseminated in the church. And, as if this were only a small matter, too many, alas! both of teachers and disciples, fairly reduce their principles to practice! In domestic life, or in the intercourse of society, individuals of this sort disgust numbers by their religious cant, their extravagant notions, and their palpable violation of all established rules of moral and relative duty. Hence scandals and prejudices are multiplied and riveted; and the opposers of the gospel, some erroneously, others maliciously, charge all these absurdities and iniquities on the whole body of those, who zealously contend for evangelical truth.

The fatal consequences of these things absolutely baffle all the powers of

Digitized by Google

calculation. "Woe be to the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come; but *woe unto that man* by whom the offence cometh!" This solemn warning of our Saviour and Judge should render us very circumspect, and careful to keep at a distance from every word and action which may thus stumble and offend observers, and help to rivet the chains of darkness on an unbelieving world. On the other hand nothing can more powerfully tend to prevent or counteract these evils, than clear and explicit instructions concerning the nature of salvation, of faith, and of holiness; and making it evidently appear, that while we preach the doctrines of free grace, we abhor both antinomian principles and practices, and that our instructions are incompatible with all these hateful abuses, and can by no rules of fair interpretation be possibly made to bear such a construction.

III. The holy nature of saving faith is thus earnestly contended for, in order to encourage weak and trembling believers. The author is well aware, that numbers will be startled at the very mention of this reason, as it is the ground on which they proceed in stating the subject in a widely different manner; but he is confident, that on an impartial investigation it will be found universally true, that the scriptural method of preventing self-deception, and of protesting against every abuse of the gospel, is also the most effectual way of comforting the broken in heart, except as previous mistakes and prejudices render them regardless of these instructions. The greater part of the *doubts* and *fears*, to which the humble and upright are liable, do not arise from apprehensions that Christ is either unable or unwilling to save the true believer, in any case whatever; but from a *suspicion that they themselves are not true believers*. They read in the Scriptures (whether they hear it from their pastors or not) that numbers deceive themselves; that Satan transformed into an angel of light deceives multitudes; that many deceivers are gone forth into the world: and that "if it were possible they would deceive the very elect." They see many turn aside whom they have looked up to, as far more advanced in religion than themselves; they are conscious of very much amiss in their hearts and in their best duties: they do not exactly know what those "things are which accompany salvation," or the nature of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." From these combined causes, they are frequently led to expect such grounds of personal confidence, as are unattainable, or to prize those which are of no value when attained; while they overlook that state of the heart, and those experiences which are infallible evidences of their reconciliation to God. *Persons of this character*, whatever doctrine they may read or hear, or however imperfect their views may be, cannot rest satisfied without some *special evidence* that their faith and hope essentially differ from the dead faith and presumption of self-deceivers, or without explicitly understanding in what that difference consists. Unless, therefore, they be clearly instructed in these points, they scarcely ever arrive at stable peace and permanent satisfaction as to the event. Hence it often happens, that almost their whole lives are occupied in fruitless endeavours to rise superior to their anxious fears, and in using one *recipe* after another to keep up a confidence of safety, without knowing on what to rest it. Thus all their earnestness is diverted into a wrong channel; and, though possessed of real love to God and man, they have little heart to improve their talents in active services, through ceaseless perplexity about their personal safety.

There is indeed a description of professors of the gospel, who, by the help of a hard heart and an unfeeling conscience, easily buoy up themselves into a confidence that all is well, and dream sweetly on the very brink of destruction. But whatever we may say or do, such as know the worth of their souls, and the import of the word ETERNITY, with the manifold danger of fatal delusion in this infinitely momentous concern, will be cautious and suspicious even to excess; and this will be the case in proportion as their views are defective or erroneous, and the opinions of those they revere are wavering and undecided, as to the proper ground of *hope* and *assurance*. For, let it here

Digitized by Google

be observed, that we extremely *mistake* or *mis-state* the matter, if we do not clearly and explicitly distinguish between *the warrant of faith*, and *the ground of assured hope*; between *the encouragement given to the vilest to come unto Christ for salvation*, and *the subsequent full and authorized satisfaction, that they have come in a right manner*. To the former nothing but the word of truth is needful; but the sanctification, seal, and witness of the Holy Spirit *with their spirits*, according to the word of truth, are indispensably requisite to the latter.

Holiness primarily signifies conformity to the holy image and law of God: but if we duly advert to the circumstances of a fallen creature under a dispensation of mercy, and the peculiar nature of the gospel, we shall evidently perceive, that the beginnings of *holiness* in a regenerate soul must assume in some respects a different aspect from the holiness of a creature that never sinned. Young converts and discouraged believers should, therefore, be taught especially to look for the evidences of their acceptance, in those *holy* dispositions which more directly belong to their situation. A broken and contrite heart, humiliation and sorrow for sin, with hatred and dread of it; willing renunciation of every kind of self-confidence and self-preference; cordial approbation of the humbling holy method of salvation proposed in the gospel; earnest desires after an interest in the atonement and righteousness of Christ; diligence in the means of grace; susceptibility of keen distress from fear of coming short of this blessing; suitable dispositions and affections towards the Saviour, his people, cause, ordinances, and precepts; tenderness of conscience manifested in willing obedience, and ingenuous grief and shame, on account of the defect and defilements of their obedience; these, I say, are the peculiar exercises of holiness, to which the attention of such persons should be directed in self-examination. Were our hearers constantly and clearly taught, that the human heart, when left to itself, is altogether proud, carnal, enmity to God and his law, and disposed to hate, despise, or make a licentious use of, his gospel; and that the unregenerate can only have a selfish unholy religion, in one form or other; and were the holy nature of salvation, and of genuine faith, fully explained, and distinguished from unscriptural views of them; the upright and humble would perceive some degree of *holiness* in their lowest depressions and most discouraging experiences, when they reviewed them in a calmer season by the light of divine truth. Thus their sighs and tears for past sins; their dread of relapsing into the evils in which they once lived without remorse; their painful and persevering, though often unsuccessful, opposition to violent temptations, and corrupt propensities, strengthened by long bad habits; and their anxious dread lest the Saviour should reject them, or Satan deceive them (about which they were once wholly unconcerned) would be conclusive proofs that a blessed change had passed upon their souls. They would then clearly perceive, that every acting of *real faith in Christ*, every *sincere desire* after the complete salvation of the gospel, is above nature, and contrary to nature, in its present fallen condition. By degrees they would learn to distinguish the precious from the vile in their own experiences and affections; and to judge of gold and alloy by the *essential qualities* of each, and not by the size or glitter of the mass. They would find a measure of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord," in their consciousness of heartily "submitting to his righteousness," and supremely valuing his salvation, as well as in cheerful unreserved obedience to his commands, from love to his name and gratitude for his mercies.—*Purity of heart* would be discerned in their abhorrence of sin, and the anguish of still feeling its detested influence, interrupting and defiling every devotional service or act of obedience; notwithstanding all their watchfulness, persevering prayers for complete deliverance, and constant opposition to its first risings in the soul. For what can so fully prove our hearts *pure*, while any sin remains in them, as habitual abhorrence of that sin? sorrow and bitterness on account of it, and earnest desires for its extirpation? Once these same evils reigned in undisturbed dominion: but as there was nothing con-

Digitized by Google

trary to them in the temper of the heart, they were scarcely noticed, and gave very little uneasiness. Then we were wholly *impure in heart*, though prone to boast of the *goodness of our hearts*; but now that we feel, detest, lament, and groan, being burdened on account of these inward evils; we are become in a measure *pure in heart*, and shall in due season be made perfectly holy.

The love of the soul to God likewise may be as certainly recognised in the sinner's mourning after him, in his grief for having offended or dishonoured him, longing for the tokens of his reconciled love, and with his patient persevering diligence, seeking it in the appointed way; as in the higher exercises of delighting in God, rejoicing in hope, and with enlivened gratitude celebrating his praises and glorifying his name.

If then weak and trembling believers were directed to look to such things, as *infallible evidences of saving grace*, it would do unspeakably more towards comforting and establishing them, than reiterated exhortations and persuasions to take it for granted that they are safe, while they can discern no evidences of their safety. Indeed, to speak the truth plainly, the stress that is often laid upon *assurance of personal safety*, as almost, if not quite, essential to faith in Christ; and the *outcry made against evidences*, in our own experience and consciousness of sanctification, as *legal* and tending to self-righteousness, and to keep the soul in bondage; is exactly calculated to buoy up the confidence of self-deceived hypocrites, and to cast into deeper dejection those, who are already discouraged through weakness of faith, temptation, and manifold infirmities. For after all, no description of men whatever, actually satisfy themselves without *evidences* of some kind or other: and when such as the Scriptures continually insist upon are discarded, others are imperceptibly substituted. Thus a door is opened to a variety of enthusiastical impressions, dreams, visions, and other species of new revelation, to inform individuals that they are the children of God; while they either are strangers to, or overlook, the sanctification of the Spirit, with which God himself seals and distinguishes those who are reconciled to him by faith in Christ Jesus. Nay, even *assurance* itself is often most absurdly made an *evidence* of saving faith! though nothing can possibly be more unattainable by the trembling discouraged believer. But, whatever other evidences a man may possess, if he do not love Christ and keep his commandments, he has no right to deem himself his disciple, if St. John be admitted as competent to decide the question: for he says expressly, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John ii. 3, 4. Let those therefore, who deny *sanctification* to be the *proper*, and the *only decisive evidence* of *justification*, fairly meet this apostolical declaration, before they attempt to reply to any of our arguments on the subject.

The discouragement to which the upright are exposed from *poring on evidences*, arises from their overlooking those beginnings of *sanctification*, which uniformly and inseparably accompany salvation: and judging of their state by such attainments as are peculiar to comparatively few of the whole multitude of believers, and to them only in the more advanced stages of their profession. The former they have, and could discern, were they but instructed to regard them as decisive: the latter they either have not, or they are incapable of ascertaining their existence.

It is of the greatest importance to the established peace and hope of believers, to distinguish accurately between the incipient holiness of a saint on earth, amidst all his conflicts and temptations; and the perfect holiness of an angel or a saint in glory. When this distinction is well understood, the deepest humiliation for detested and lamented defilements will not weaken a believer in discouragement, or lead him to conclude himself a hypocrite. He will in this manner be enabled to take the comfort of what the Lord hath done *in him* by his Spirit, as well as of what he hath done *for him* in the redemption of his Son: even while increasing knowledge and sensibility of con-

Digitized by Google

science render him far more aware of his sinfulness, and far more grieved for it, than he formerly was. *Self-dissatisfaction* must be essential to the holiness of an imperfect creature: nay, the more he is enlightened and renewed, the more he delights in God and communes with him, and the more he loves and longs after holiness, the lower will he sink in humility of heart, and at last deem his humiliation, all things considered, lamentably defective. This was the case with St. Paul. While he was unquestionably one of the most eminent believers on earth, he deemed himself "less than the least of all saints:" yet he never intimated a doubt but that he was a saint; and, had he been interrogated on the subject, would probably have considered his present lowly view of himself, contrasted with his former self-exaltation and self-complacency, when a persecuting Pharisee, as a most decisive evidence that he was "in Christ a new creature: so that old things were passed away, and behold! all things were become new."

If self-abasement, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, constant application to Christ, with believing reliance and earnest desire, for all the blessings of his new covenant, from unfeigned consciousness of our entire indigence and unworthiness, be not considered as real holiness; it must follow, that the more humble we become, the less we shall be able to rejoice in God: except we close our eyes to all those passages in the Scripture, which declare a new creation to good works, a spiritual mind, and the fruits of the Spirit, to be essential to a state of acceptance with God. For in that case, increasing humility would render us less capable of discerning, and less disposed to consider, these distinguishing effects of special grace: and how could we give God the glory of having made us to differ, if we could not, without pride, perceive that we were actually made to differ? But if we admit that the things above considered, constitute an important part of holiness, and are inseparably connected with all the rest; then indeed the life of faith will carry its own evidence along with it; except in seasons of peculiar darkness and temptation, when we cannot ascertain the real nature of our own desires and experiences. And at these times we should come as sinners on the warrant of the *general invitations*, which after a while will again clear up our special interest in the *promises* made to believers.

If these things be not attended to, unestablished Christians, when exhorted to "examine themselves whether they be in the faith," are exceedingly perplexed, and scarcely know how to set about it: and this perplexity is frequently increased by an indeterminate way of speaking concerning the sins of believers, which prevails both in books and sermons. The language of the sacred oracles, concerning the *daring rebellions* of the Israelites, who like *nominal* Christians, were too generally mere formalists, is often accommodated, without much precision, to the *lamented sins* of true believers; and even unfeigned humility leads some excellent persons to mention their own experience in terms which may be misunderstood by carnal persons, (who wish to conclude that there is no essential difference betwixt themselves and pious Christians,) to mean habitual and allowed transgression.—And thus, while "*workers of iniquity*" are emboldened in the confident hope of salvation, notwithstanding their wilful and unrepented crimes; discouraged and tempted believers are led to think themselves like Ahab, or Judas, or other reprobates mentioned in the Scripture; because, in some one particular, they seem to discern a faint similitude between a part of their conduct, and that of these hypocrites and apostates in ancient times.

No doubt the holiness of a real believer includes a disposition to love and delight in the whole law of God, to hate and forsake all sin, to practise all good works, and to aspire in all respects unto more perfect conformity to the divine image: and no *supposed* humiliation, experience, or reliance on the Saviour, can prove any one a true Christian, who allows himself in known sin, or habitually neglects known duty. Yet the exercises of heart, above insisted on, are undoubtedly *holiness* in its root and seminal principle: and if weak and wavering believers were instructed to find the evidences of their

Digitized by Google

safety, and the pledges of their felicity, in these things about which they are most conversant, and from which their distresses commonly arise; they would more speedily be brought to establishment. When this was done, they would have more leisure, composure, and encouragement, to study and practise all other duties, to "crucify," still further, "the flesh with its affections and lusts," to cultivate all those holy tempers in which they had been most defective, and to improve their talents to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind.

Even in "giving all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity;"—in order to "make our calling and election sure;" it is of great importance to know the nature and value of those things which we have already received: and in all the subsequent experience of the most assured believer, his habitual judgment, affections, and state of mind, relative to Christ and his salvation, must concur with every other evidence, to preserve his confidence unwavering, that "he has passed from death unto life." It is, therefore, in all respects of the greatest moment, to the real Christian's comfort, establishment, and fruitfulness, to possess a clear perception, that every acting of true faith implies a degree of genuine holiness, and evidences the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.

These are the principal reasons, on account of which the holy nature of saving faith has been so strenuously contended for: and they are abundantly sufficient, provided the truth of the doctrine has been scripturally established.—I shall therefore now release my reader, by earnestly requesting him to bestow some time and pains, in acquiring a clear and ready understanding of the following distinctions, which seem to me of vast importance in these discussions,—viz. The distinction between *a warrant to believe*, and *a disposition to believe*; between *a man's being spiritually alive and in part sanctified*, and *his knowing himself to be so*; between *the holy nature of faith*, and *the sinner's perception of that holiness, and taking encouragement from it in coming to Christ*; between *the promises absolutely made to true believers*, and *the invitations given to sinners, with those promises which imply exhortations and suppose a compliance with them*; between *a warrant to believe in Christ*, and *a confidence that we are believers*; between *the believer's consciousness of sanctification, used as an evidence that his faith is living and justifying*, and *a self-righteous dependence on something in ourselves as in a degree the meritorious ground of our acceptance*; and finally, between *faith* and *hope*: *the full assurance of faith*, and *the full assurance of hope*.

I trust the serious inquirer will not deem these to be distinctions without a difference, or made in matters of small moment: and it appears to me, after many years assiduous and earnest investigation of this subject, more than any other in theology; that a want of due attention to these distinctions is a principal cause of that amazing diversity of opinion, and that unaccountable inconsistence and perplexity, which are observable in the conversation, sermons, and writings of many evangelical persons on this apparently plain and most important subject. But it will answer little purpose to run them over; or even to allow that the things distinguished are really distinct, and that the distinctions are important; unless they be, one by one, deeply considered, compared with Scripture, and either deliberately rejected, or thoroughly applied to practical uses.

The last distinction mentioned, may perhaps require a little farther elucidation. Men clearly understanding the system of the gospel, the harmony and just proportion of its parts, and its tendency and design, may be said to possess "the full assurance of understanding." Col. ii. 2. When they cordially believe and embrace the gospel, they have *faith*; when this faith excludes all doubts concerning the truth of the gospel, and its sufficiency for every purpose for which it is given, and the eternal salvation of all real believers, they have the *full assurance of faith*. But they only possess *hope*, in

Digitized by Google

proportion as they are satisfied that they themselves are true believers: nor have they the *full assurance of hope*, so long as they have any doubt concerning their own salvation.—*Assured faith* is every man's duty, to whom the gospel is proposed with suitable evidence; and accordingly every one is exhorted thus to believe: Heb. x. 22. But *assured hope* must be obtained and preserved by holy diligence, and cannot be the proximate duty of the impenitent, or even of the negligent. When the apostle "stood in doubt" of the Galatians, and told them that he saw cause to do so; was it not their duty to stand in doubt of themselves? But was it likewise their duty to question the truth of the gospel; or the power and willingness of Christ to save all that come to him?—Certainly not.

The author having found much establishment in his own soul, even while passing through sharp conflicts and dark temptations, by attending to these distinctions; and having had the satisfaction of leading a considerable number of discouraged inquirers to establishment, and settled peace in the same way; cannot but earnestly recommend them to the candid attention of those who shall read this publication. He allows that a considerable measure of close thinking is requisite to obtain a clear and distinct view of such subjects: and that they are not much suited to the taste of a *dissipated and superficial age*, in which the church is not a little infected with the disease most epidemical in the world; and also that there are persons who are scarcely capable of such investigations. But for these very reasons it becomes the more incumbent on intelligent and better educated Christians, and especially on the pastors of the flock, to aim at proficiency in these studies. Clear ideas suggest perspicuous language: and the compact style of an argumentative discourse, when *dilated* in familiar conversation and constant instruction, may be rendered intelligible to plain people; at least the most useful part will thus make its way into the minds of those who cannot understand the discourse itself. Finally, truth is worth all the labour of digging out of the mine, though it be deep: and they who have leisure and ability should bestow pains to enrich their brethren as well as themselves; nor can the subject be better closed than with the following important passage: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding; yea, if thou *criest after knowledge*, and *liftest up thy voice for understanding*; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.—For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Prov. ii. 1—6.

FINIS

PRINTED BY ANDERSON & BRYCE.

Digitized by Google

DO

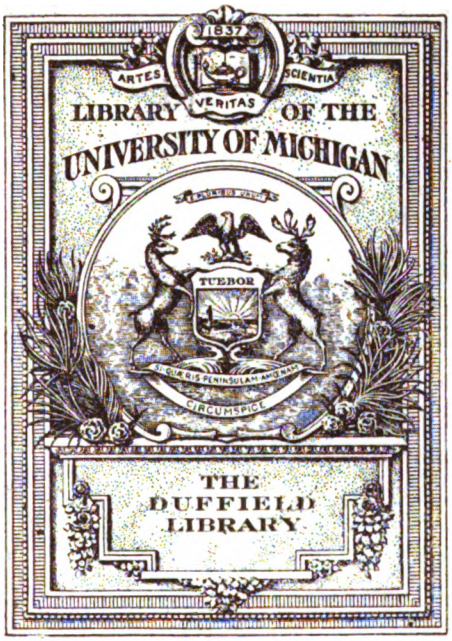
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

NOT CIRCULATE

Digitized by Google

3 9015 06785 6792



THE GIFT OF
THE TAPPAN PRESBY-
TERIAN ASSOCIATION

B 451725

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google